

# Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF  
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1994



# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the  
Circus Historical Society

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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1994

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

Harold Barnes, who tells his family's story starting in this issue, hit the big time as a teenager with Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus in 1935.

The cover lithograph was used by the Cole show in 1936 and 1937. It is from the Pfening Archives.

## 1994 CHS CONVENTION

A multifaceted program is scheduled for the December 8-10, 1994 CHS convention. John Pugh, co-owner of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, will be the featured banquet speaker. Two displays of historic circus material will be shown, comprising rarities from the Ringling Museum Circus Galleries and the James Dunwoody collection. A visit to the Ringling Museum conservation lab is also scheduled.

Noted circus historians will present special papers. Panel discussions by circus personnel have been arranged. Attendees will discuss circus related issues with show people on a personal basis. There will be several opportunities to mix with circus people at the famous Showfolks of Sarasota club house. The group will receive VIP treatment at the George Hubler-produced Showfolks Circus.

A ladies luncheon will be hosted by Janice Tibbals at her beautiful condominium.

um on Longboat Key. The ever popular CHS auction will be on Thursday night. With so many show people residing in Sarasota, the historic nature of that city and the special activities being arranged, you will find this convention very exciting.

Plan to register now by completing the registration card enclosed with this issue and send it with your registration fee to convention chairman Fred Dahlinger, 451 Roblee Road, Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913.

Registration and fellowship will be available at the hotel the evening of December 7. The formal activities will begin in the morning on December 8, and continue through Saturday evening December 10.

Hotel reservations should be made directly by calling the Sarasota Holiday Inn Airport-Marina, 813-355-2781. Be sure to mention you are registering for the CHS convention to receive the special rates of \$49 for a standard room or \$59 for a bay-view room. Complimentary van transportation is provided to and from the Sarasota airport by the hotel.

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## CORRECTION

Three photos in the Felix Morales article in the July-August *Bandwagon* were misidentified.

On page 26 the man identified as Martine Morales is an unknown person. On page 27 the photo at upper left is Martine, Conception and Felix dressed as a girl, at lower left the individuals are Pietta, Lola and Felix, not Fuanita, Lola and Felix.

## INFORMATION NEEDED

Jim Fogarty, P. O. Box 774, Penrith, NSW, 2750 Australia is seeking information on American circuses that visited Australia in the 1880s.

He has identified Joel Tompkin's 1862 California Circus; Greenberg's Great American, 1866; John Wilson's Great San Francisco Circus in 1876 and Woodlock's American Circus in 1895.

## CHRISTMAS ADS

The extra large Christmas issue of *Bandwagon* provides an ideal opportunity for CHS members to extend holiday greetings to fellow members and circuses. The advertising rates are listed in the masthead.

Send your copy, layout and check to the editor by December 1, 1994. Circuses and other professionals are also invited to place their greetings in this issue.

## ADDRESS CHANGES

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# History of the BEERS-BARNES CIRCUS "The Barnum of the Sticks" By Harold Barnes

## PART ONE

### FOR WORD

**A**s far back as thirty years people have suggested that I write a history of the Barnes family, leading up to the Beers-Barnes Circus. And for that same number of years I have laughed off these suggestions because I am not a writer nor a researcher. Why, I can't even locate my shoes in the morning.

In the meantime, my wife, Gayle DeRizkie, who was born and reared in the circus business, and with considerable support and backing from our daughter, Cherie, has exerted overwhelming pressure on me to embark upon such a project.

Likewise, my two first cousins, Roger Barnes' daughters, Doris Davis and Lois Hoover, along with Lois' son George, both currently on the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, have made known to me the same desire—the arguments being that I am the last male in the immediate family and when I go to "winter quarters," all my route books will go with me.

So, reinforced by all these nostalgic photos, the idea then became more intriguing, and in thinking about the rocky ascent and descent of this band of troubadours, the urge to become family historian became too overwhelming to procrastinate any longer. Time marches onward and increases its cadence each and every year; it is currently galloping along too rapidly for comfort and this urge now has become quite urgent.

As I started to write my heart began to pound and my stomach felt like it was being forced through a meat grinder, the same feeling I felt more years ago than I care to think about when standing in the wings at Radio City Music Hall and the Palladium in London waiting for my very first appearance on those great stages.

But, where do I start? Where do I begin?

Then, suddenly, at high speed rewind my memory started racing back seventy odd years to a little khaki tent and my fa-

ther, Clint; his brother, Roger (Uncle "Pokey"); my distinguished grandmother Barnes who carried herself like Queen Victoria and who always looked as if she were on stage; and my grandfather Barnes, tall, straight, honest, fair, possessed with a little "hype"—well, perhaps a bit more than just a little—which was necessary, I suppose, when running a small show in some of the backwoods towns of the United States around the turn of the century.

Scion of an aristocratic New York family with a string of high jumping horses, my grandfather often took to England to ride the hounds with the then Prince of Wales, later crowned Edward VII who, of course, gave it all up to be with his adored wife. Pompous to the end, Clinton James Barnes (C. J.) died before I got to know him well, but happily I still have fleeting memories of this "Barnum of the

Harold Gordon Barnes, wire walker, tent entrepreneur and author. Pfening Archives.



Sticks." He could stand up to anyone, negotiate firmly but fairly, and would give his last dime to anyone who needed it, which he did on many occasion.

Every Monday afternoon after his week-stand show was set up and ready to go, he would take my first cousin Doris and I, dressed in our Sunday best, to the village ice cream parlor. As we sat on the little wire-backed chairs having ice cream, he conversed with the proprietor and other locals present.

Though these outings always ended with Doris and me throwing ice cream at each other and his vowing "never again" upon our return to the lot, the following Monday would find us once again in another ice cream parlor in another village to repeat the battle of the ice cream.

I like to think that he did this because he cared for us—and though I am certain that he very definitely did—I am now aware that these downtown ice cream excursions, always on opening days, were hype to let the town people see the gentle side of this traveling showman who rolled into town "to take all the money away," as was often said in these country areas.

Do I start this history when George Beers brought his family of five to join the caravan already performing in this khaki tent back when our doughboys were fighting in the trenches in France?

No! The story starts many years earlier in the legitimate theaters of Broadway, back even before they moved northward to their present home in and around Times Square.

The story actually begins in England, but not being the researcher, our history will start in Gotham--The Great, White Way--The Big Apple--New York City.

I have tried to give dates, situations and personnel as accurately as possible. Countless hours have been spent with Doris and Lois, who were also on the original Barnes Comedy Co., and countless nights spent studying Clint and Roger's route books dating from the turn of the century. They were so complete they even gave such information as the food in some of the boarding houses in which they stayed; whether the girls in certain areas were pretty or not; and even honestly reported that a Toledo, Ohio, theater manager would not hire their act in 1908, saying it was "too bad."

Yes, I've tried to give an accurate report. Some situations, retrieved from the dank chambers of my mind after being stored away some sixty to seventy years, brought tears to these tired, old eyes. But, try as I did, I'm certain that some dates and matching situations chronicled herein might be in error and that some alert circus historian will discover the error, for which I must apologize in advance.

Since this history is in story form instead of cold, hard facts, and is written almost first person, singular, it may seem one sided and autobiographical. And occasionally I may drift off into a subject that may not seem like Beers-Barnes history. This may be understandable since this is my life, too, and it is difficult for me to write this history without an abundance of "I's." I was there for most of the time with everything else explained to me covering the times I was not present. I tried to be truthful even though some events were painful just remembering, let alone transcribing, onto paper.

So, if this outline leans heavily on the Barnes side, it is simply because I am a Barnes. I accepted and loved the Beers family. God! Grandma Beers was the midwife who brought me into the world. How could I be any closer to anybody. Grandpa Beers and Uncle Charley, we all knew, would chisel anybody including family and partners with Beers-Barnes. Everyone, even some outsiders, were aware of this but to maintain harmony, it was accepted. Nevertheless, in my heart Grandpa and Grandma Beers, Uncle Charley, Aunt Ella, and Aunt Tillie were true blood uncles and aunts, and family.

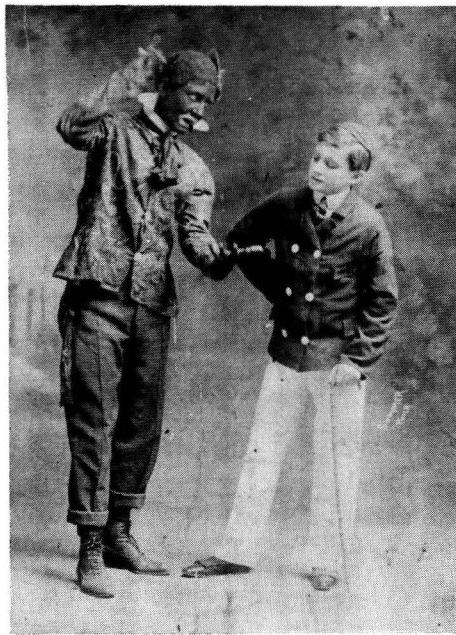
Aunt Ola (Viola) Kadel was also important in the show's founding. She apprenticed my mother when she was six years old and introduced her to show business. She later taught me how to take a proper bow. Her husband, Uncle Al Kadel, tall and dignified, always had time to answer my questions and explain things to a growing, inquisitive boy.

I owe so much to Uncle Slim Bigerstaff, who said "This boy should be a tight wire walker," and to prove it he set up my first wire and started my practice.

None were related, yet all were family. But, I was reared with and was privy to the workings of the Barnes family from the beginning because, as I said, I am a Barnes.

Important roles in making this outline as accurate as possible were played by my wife, Gayle DeRizkie Pealer; Roger's daughters, Doris, wife of Walter Davis and her younger sister, Lois, wife of Dave Hoover, lion trainer, currently on the Beatty Show; and "Aunt" Sadie Weiss, former wife of Charles Beers and the last remaining tie to the first generation Beers Players.

All have a wealth of old photographs which when compared with mine became more recognizable the longer I studied them. Names, dates and inscriptions on the backs of these photos would suddenly bring forgotten situations vividly into mind, and hours spent conversing with Doris, Lois and Sadie both in person and



Clinton (Snowball) Barnes and straight man Roger Barnes around 1907. Author's collection.

by telephone helped clear out many cobwebs which were spun many years ago.

Much has been said about Beers-Barnes: some true; some exaggerated. "The Barnum of the Sticks."

That must get an affirmative nod. The routes would often take them far away from civilization, so far away that only a circus fan would find them, after getting lost while going back to an out house on some forsaken West Virginia mountain. Yet, they often played in such metropolitan areas as New York City, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and other great cities of the East.

It worked well for it brought a circus to areas that had never before seen one, and eliminated competition since other shows were afraid of setting up in such places as mine holes. In company towns, the show trucks were met at the rim or crest of huge mine holes by Caterpillar tractors that would lower them one by one into the hole. Script would be accepted in lieu of money which was exchanged for the real stuff at the end of the night. And, of course, the show was pulled out the next morning by the same Cats.

Was the show liked and accepted by people who read only about "The Greatest, The Biggest, The Most Elephants," etc.?

Emphatically yes. It was a complete family circus and could have operated entirely without outside help, a situation that did indeed occur on many occasions.

However, people are brainwashed by term such as the largest, the most, and the greatest. One morning, while creeping

down the side of a mountain, Roger's wife Ella lost the brakes on her trailer and careened down the mountain like a runaway, which she was. Seeing a dirt path leading up the side of the mountain, she took it, going up as far as the momentum would take her. She threw the car into park and hit every brake she had and sat there, waiting for help. A car with two young local men came barreling around the bend, rushed up the pathway, stopped behind her trailer and ran to the car, obviously to help.

Ella looked out to thank the boys when they blurted out, "Is that all you've got, just two elephants?"

I'll wager that they'll never forget the answer they got.

It wasn't easy being a "mountain show" before the days of express and interstate highways. On many, we were lucky to find them paved, and on some occasions, lucky to even have a road.

For example, we once played an island lot in the bend of two rivers. The ancient bridge over which the trucks passed would accommodate only passenger cars so a bull dozer was called in to level a path over the river bank and into the water where the trucks forded the river, pulled across by old Alice, one of our faithful elephants.

True. The family owned and worked all animals, including elephants, a dromedary, chimps, sea lions, a trained bear, trained dogs, monkeys and ponies. Liberty horses, and dressage horses (one and the same) were put out to pasture at the end of the season never to see the inside of a circus ring until the first show the following year.

True. Beers-Barnes spent so much time in the mountains of West Virginia, Tennessee and Pennsylvania that the children were born with one leg shorter than the other . . . well, that may be slightly exaggerated.

This story has been going around a long time. If a movie we wanted to see was showing nearby, the matinee would be cancelled and customers who came to the lot would be advised to see the movie with us and then come to the night show to see the circus. That actually happened.

True. Despite its size, Beers-Barnes was an extremely entertaining show. Doris and Lois Barnes, and Sadie Beers all were beautiful and talented. And when Gayle DeRizkie, my wife, became a part of Beers-Barnes and brought on her younger sister, Sandra DeRizkie, the beauty and talent continued.

On the other hand when the performance was reduced to but four men, the show was equally accepted. I attribute this to the stage technique of projecting oneself beyond the foot lights and becoming part of the audience. For ex-



Harold's father Clinton Barnes. Author's collection.

ample, during one four-man season when I followed myself instead of leaving one ring only to re-enter the other as a new act, I would walk directly from one ring to the other and before embarking on the second act, would put my hand to my head in mock disgust and say to the audience, "My God! Here he is again," which always brought on a laugh and helped them accept the situation instead feeling I was wearing out my welcome.

This early stage training was carried throughout the performance. There was no pantomime with the clowning. They were talking clowns and the patter continued throughout all gags, even including the announcer at times. Roger talked throughout the elephant act as did Charley with the sea lion and chimpanzee numbers. It created a certain intimacy between performer and audience.

A couple of times when I missed a somersault I would put my hands on my hips, look up at the wire and say "DAMN." Then look to the audience and ask "Should I try it again?" and the crowd would yell, "YES!, go ahead." Intimacy.

Kids were born and grew up on the show, going into the ring when they were able to walk, like most show kids. Not that they had to, but only if they wanted to.

My daughter Cherie, along with cousin Doris' daughter, Donna, when both were around three years old, always played on the trampoline as all show punks do. But Cherie negotiated her own salary to work in the act—matinees only—the salary being fifty cents a week. Since everyone "doubled in brass," her obligation was to hand her Uncle Pokey the springs as he assembled the trampoline each day. This simple job gave her a feeling of accomplishment.

Her grandmother, Letha DeRizkie Peal-

er, made her wardrobe as she had done for years for her own children, and Cherie faithfully worked every matinee. Each Saturday she would wait outside the office wagon to receive her pay from Charley Beers.

The show was not more important than education, however, and offspring remained in Miami with a family member, usually Irene, my mother, until Sadie and Charley separated and she took over the job. When school was out they would be shipped to the show for the summer and then back again when the fall semester began. All the children received a minimum of a high school education, some going much higher.

Cherie, for example, beside her bachelor degree, has added two additional masters degrees in psychology and in addition to her own counseling practice, also works for the government in the psychiatric department of the Veterans Administration Hospital in Miami, which is a far cry from handing springs to her Uncle Pokey.

But show business coursed through her veins and she always resented our leaving circuses. To satisfy her desires she began training in ballet at six and once, while I was negotiating the rental of a tent for Rudy Jacobi's Rudy Bros. Circus, she picked up the extension telephone and booked herself to do a trapeze act for the season, even though she had not hung from a trap bar since she was a baby.

Gayle and I hurriedly set up a rigging and extensive practice began. On her opening day, Tommy Bentley, who was manager and promoter of Rudy Bros., killed the other acts in the display and presented her in the center ring alone. He gave her a flowering introduction and arranged for a bouquet of roses to be delivered in the ring. We were very proud of her performance and her many years of ballet training were quite apparent in her graceful and finished performance. There was a bit of nostalgia here for her mother, as Cherie's grandfather, Frank DeRizkie, taught Tommy Bentley how to do a foot slide on the King Bros. Circus in 1947.

The other offspring from both sides, though involved in the circus in their youth, apparently had no interest in show business after the show went off the road. Exceptions, beside Cherie, are Lois Hoover's son, George, who stayed with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus to be with his parents and is working in concessions; and Alan Mixon, son of Eddie Mixon and Tillie Beers, who is in the legitimate theater in New York.

Being an emotional old cuss, I must admit that bringing back certain memories I thought had been erased years ago was more emotionally difficult than I originally anticipated. I hope somebody--



Harold's uncle Roger Barnes. Author's collection.

anybody--reads this history. But if not and this story does nothing else, it has at least allowed me to take a trip down memory lane one more time. Please bear with me now while I try to dig into history.

### The Beginning

The American theater's origins are in England. Great plays were shipped to this new, barbaric world and many of England's finest actors came to portray the characters written for them in these scripts.

In the mid-nineteenth century three theatrical families were prominent in the New York legitimate scene: the Booths, the Jeffersons, and the Wallacks, the last being instrumental in bringing from London to New York the Dorrington family, forerunners of the Barnes family.

Third generation actor, Lester Wallack, aside from being one of the great actors of his time, displayed enviable skills in theater management as well and he first leased the Broome Theatre on Thirteenth and Broome where he produced his own plays as well as renting out the theater to other producers.

Extremely successful in this venture, he moved to another theater on Thirteenth and Broadway and much later to a theater at Twenty-third and Broadway. This was the first theater to operate under his family's name. The Old Wallack Theatre at Twenty-Third and Broadway catered to the society element and was extremely successful with Lester Wallack occasionally returning to the stage for important roles.

As the theater district continued to move northward, he broke ground for a new and lavish theater at Thirty-third and Broadway with greater seating capacity, a lavish lobby, an enlarged stage and a

large and modern loft to accommodate the more spectacular plays.

To make certain the proper loft was designed and built, he brought Frederick Dorrington, a stage director and master mechanic, from London in 1876 to manage the stage at the Twenty-Third Street theater and at the same time plan and supervise the construction of the stage and loft of the new Thirty-Third Street house.

Dorrington arrived with his wife, Blanche, prima ballerina of the London Ballet, and daughter, Alice Blanche, six years old, who would become the mother of Clinton and Roger Barnes.

The theater opened January 4, 1882, presenting *The School for Scandal*. It operated successfully, producing spectacles created by Dorrington, the scope of which is now seen only in motion pictures, with battlefields, erupting volcanoes and a set replicating the rear of a passenger train leaving the station (upstage) with the male and female leads on the observation platform, singing the show's theme. The train became smaller and smaller as it moved away until finally out of sight.

This Dorrington-created set received more press than the play itself, and on opening night when the plaudits brought forth the stars, director, and author for curtain calls, cries for "FRED DORRINGTON!" erupted throughout the house and Dorrington, in coveralls-dressed to be prepared to correct any malfunction of his telescoping prop this important opening night-was forced to step in front of the curtain to acknowledge the applause and praise for his innovative setting.

While at the Old Wallack Theatre, Dorrington organized the stage hands in New York, and through his efforts the first stage hands' union in the United States, Local #1, was formed. His portrait was still hanging in the union hall in New York City the last time I visited.

During her father's long tenure with Wallack, Alice Blanche grew up back stage at the theatres. She attended an exclusive girls' school in Albany, spoke French fluently, became an accomplished pianist and appeared on stage in ingenue rolls. Her best friend was Dorothy Donnelly who, with Alice Blanche's musical knowledge, wrote the libretto for the operetta *Blossom Time*.

She met and fell in love with a sometime actor, who was a terrible bass singer with a vibrato sounding like a jack hammer. He was, however, a charming and forceful man. Black sheep of an aristocratic family, (black sheep because he leaned toward the theater), an equestrian with a stable of high jumping horses, Clinton James Barnes was commonly known as C. J. or Jim.

Returning from England with his horses after participating in a fox hunt with

the then Prince of Wales (later crowned Edward VII), he and Alice Blanche married in 1891 and moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where they produced two sons: Clinton Dorrington in 1893, and Roger Arthur in 1896.

After three years they moved to Mankato, Minnesota, and then to Hamilton, Ohio, areas good for the horses and far enough away from stages so that the two boys could enroll in school, sing in the choir in the Episcopal church; serve as altar boys and even carry the cross in the opening processions. (They later assured me that the procession was not called the Spec.)

In 1906 the two boys, then ten and thirteen, developed a double act consisting of songs, dancing and comedy with Clinton doing blackface comedy and Roger being the straight man, and booked themselves into nickelodeons, which were plentiful, for a few dollars per show.

Roger as a small child possessed a beautiful soprano voice which was cultivated by his mother and protected. It was so high in pitch that often-times he was dressed as a girl, revealing that he was a boy only at the close of the act.

Clinton, on the other hand, leaned toward comedy, and though his voice was not of such a fine quality as Roger's, was a master at "putting a song over."

Alice Blanche, having lived the early part of her life on New York stages, offered her guidance and added music. Soon they were in demand in the area around Hamilton and Cincinnati with the talents of Clinton, now known as Snowball Barnes becoming recognized—even as a boy—as far away as New York City

Roger and Clinton Barnes in 1915. Author's collection.



where he was offered an "end" with the Coburn Minstrels, a company on a par with Al G. Fields' Minstrels.

The offer was turned down due to his age, but after hearing applause and smelling grease paint and burnt cork, life back on the farm just couldn't compete with the new act, The Barnes Brothers.

At the insistence of the two boys and mother, patriarch C. J. Barnes sold the horses to form a family act so that they could return to show business and stay together.

In 1907 they acquired a piano, scenery and props for a sitting room set and named the act An Evening At Home. The rising curtain would discover a parlor with mother playing the piano, father reading the paper, and the boy and "girl" playing on the floor. At the father's suggestion, mother would play a classical rendition followed by Roger's singing which always brought the house down.

Dancing and comedy between the boys and their father followed with Clinton applying burnt cork to his face on stage before the audience. They continued with blackface dialogue until the end of the act when Roger removed his wig and stripped the dress, revealing that he was a boy.

When Roger reached puberty and his voice changed, he lost the soprano range (and his feet were growing larger than those of a little girl), but he could still sing well enough as a boy. Clinton's voice, on the other hand, became more developed and with his knack of comedy and presentation the act was built more and more around him with Roger developing his skill as a straight man.

Without Roger's soprano singing, however, the act lacked punch and the format was changed. Since the minstrel was such a popular type of entertainment in those days, C. J. decided that the entire family would work blackface, calling the act Twenty Minutes With The Minstrels.

It had audience appeal and Gus Sun bought the act for two years for his string of theaters as did the U. B. O. Keith-Orpheum circuit. They worked the north eastern and middle Atlantic circuits.

Bookings kept the act working steadily almost without lay-off. They would play an outdoor date or a run of several weeks under canvas, and the day after closing would instantly be booked in another theater.

#### On The Road

Twenty Minutes With The Minstrels opened at the Queen Theatre in Hamilton, Ohio, on November 15, 1909, booked with a traveling variety show produced by N. Harry Cancie, a businessman from Chicago, running through January 29, 1910, the show closing at the National Wonder Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio.

Their contract with U. B. O. Keith started in Cleveland and carried the act through Ohio and into Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh where they worked only Keith Theaters.

Gus Sun then picked up the contract with bookings for two weeks under canvas followed by two weeks at Kennywood Park which at that time was a picnic grounds containing a band shell where shows were presented. Sun then routed the act east to Philadelphia where they stayed at "Mom's" theatrical boarding house and worked Gus Sun's theaters through December 1910.

In 1911 they played 40 theaters for Keith, Sun, and independent bookings, working down from Philadelphia through Baltimore and into the Eastern Shore of Virginia, Maryland and Delaware into 1912. They took a break in Lewes, Delaware, and rented a home to allow Clinton and Roger to catch up with their schooling.

The lay-off lasted until September 9, 1912, when they joined Trout And Arledge, two young men named Taylor Trout and Hamp Arledge who with a small inheritance took a small vaudeville show under canvas on the road. Having very little experience they persuaded the Barnes family to join at Parksley, Virginia, on the Eastern Shore. Although Taylor did comedy juggling with cigar boxes and bicycle wheels, and single, stand-up comedy, the Barnes family formed the nucleus of the show.

They moved south, crossing the Chesapeake Bay Ferry and worked Cape Charles, Virginia, October 7-12, continuing down through North Carolina where they folded in Dunn on November 30 after a blow down. Not having money to pay salaries and in debt to the family, Trout and Arledge offered them the show's physical equipment in lieu of money.

C. J. gathered his clan together and asked if they wanted to own a tent show to keep in storage to use when bookings were slow. It would be a risk, he said, and a partnership was suggested for both their future theater and outdoor bookings since there would be a lot of work with booking, setting up, and doing the show. Clinton agreed but Roger, perhaps because of his youth, said he would rather work for a salary.

They accepted the show and stored it away as they had immediate bookings with Tom Corbett, brother of Gentleman Jim Corbett, world champion prize fighter. To capitalize on his brother's name, agents headlined him on a route of split week bookings in theaters and needed a show to back him up. Corbett was not a draw and after opening in Duke, North Carolina from December, 9-11, 1912, the

show barely lasted until January, 1913.

Having committed themselves to Jethro Almond, the Barnes family moved the newly acquired show equipment by horse drawn gaily from storage in Dunn, North Carolina, to the Albemarle winter quarters of the Almond show where part of the equipment went to help Jethro and Mamie Almond frame their three car railroad vaudeville show which opened in March, 1913, in Albemarle, North Carolina.

#### Framing The Show

At this point I break from the saga of the Barnes family and go to Philadelphia, and an English family that had no experience in show business. The family was headed by George Sutcliffe, a Yorkshireman who worked in the Stetson hat factory; and his wife, Nancy, a five-foot tall lass of pure gold from Lancaster, England, who, beside notwithstanding his weekly Saturday night sessions with the bottle at the neighborhood pub, bore him twelve children, raised eight and lived to be 94 years of age.

In the middle of this mass of children was a girl born February 1, 1899 who at the age of four possessed a singing voice of unusual strength, clarity and quality. Her working brothers supplied her with nickels and dimes each week out of their meager paychecks to take singing lessons coupled with dance and instruction in stage craft and stage presence.

Her name was Irene—just Irene, no middle name—a little slip of a girl, whose theatrical agent who booked her at theaters in and around Philadelphia when she was five and six. She was billed "Irene, The Little Girl With The Big Voice," and at her tender age would ride the trolley cars alone each night to and from theaters to fulfill her engagements. She carried with her a little valise in

The Kadell & Kritchfield rail car and company. The band is at right ready for a downtown bally. Pfening Archives.

which she packed her make-up and stage wardrobe.

On one such engagement was a lady aerialist doing balancing trapeze who had been on the Forepaugh-Sells Circus, P. T. Barnum, Sparks Circus, and others. She was known as Viola (Ola) Morgan, whose husband, Al Kadel, had played in the bands on these circuses as well. (In the Forepaugh-Sells 1896 route book he is listed as player of E flat clarinet in the big show band and second trombone in the first parade band.)

Kadel negotiated with the Sutcliffe family to take Irene into apprenticeship, and to send her earnings back to her family in Philadelphia each week. Which he did. Al Kadel, along with his brother-in-law, Clarence Kritchfield, were framing a railroad Uncle Tom and Ten Night show, both of which featured a little girl.

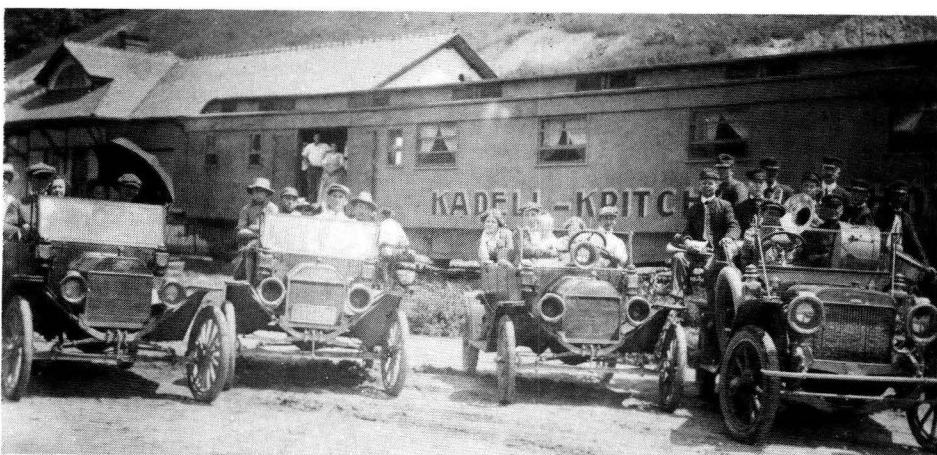
Kadel and Kritchfield presented the melodrama *Uncle Tom's Cabin* above the imaginary Mason-Dixon line, with Irene cast in the role of Little Eva; and *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* below the line where she played the part of Mary Morgan.

Both scripts called for the young girl's death and she was so realistic in the death scenes that audiences would not leave at the end of the performances until Irene was brought out before the curtain to prove that she was playing a part and did not actually die.

She was so important to the show that once when she fell from the rear of the observation platform on their train (while the train was moving slowly) they had to close the show for two weeks until she recuperated.

After several seasons of these melodramatic plays, Kadel and Kritchfield changed the format to a variety show where Irene sang, danced and acted in one-act openers and after pieces.

At the end of the 1912 season, the brothers-in-law had a serious disagreement and closed the show, selling the railroad cars to the Sparks Circus with



Kritchfield (Kritch) joining the show where he remained for many years.

Al and Ola Kadel and the apprenticed child, Irene, who had taken the name Kadel, then joined the Jethro Almond 3-car vaudeville show, where they worked in conjunction with the C. J. Barnes family until the Almond show closed for the season in January, 1914.

Using the laid-off acts, including Al and Ola Kadel, Irene, Rube Snyder and the Jethro Almond band, C. J. Barnes then formed a bona fide minstrel show with the minstrel circle as first part, the olio for specialty acts in the entre acts, and one act after pieces for the closers.

Clint Barnes was 50-50 partner in this show, called the Ohio Minstrels, and operated with a cast of twenty-one people. The show booked percentage dates in the smaller, less pretentious theaters and opera houses, and on salary with the larger Keith theaters.

They opened January 26, 1914, and continued with steady bookings until returning to Jethro Almond for his reopening on June 22 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. They remained with Almond until his season closed in Albemarle, North Carolina on November 28.

The Ohio Minstrels again took to the boards, keeping the same cast, again with Al, Ola and Irene Kadel, and added a contortionist named Lambetti. Opening date was Thomasville, North Carolina, November 30 and they again worked both salaried and percentage dates.

On February 16, 1915, the family met the Wallet family of bareback riders featuring Rose Wallet, the noted rider. They had dabbled with minstrels with son Bill Wallet, later of Havre de Grace, Maryland, doing black face. The Wallets proposed a merger between their family and the Barnes family to form a combination

The personnel and marquee of the Jethro Almond show. Pfening Archives.

circus-stage show with the stage against the side of the tent and a ring in front. The same format was tried by Beers-Barnes their first year of operation. The Wallets' proposal was rejected.

It is interesting to read Roger's notes in his 1915 route book.

Friday, February 19: "Watched the Wallets practice. Fine people."

Week of February 22: "Oxford, North Carolina. Played Opera house. Thomas boarding house, good board. Colored band played for us. Rain, poor biz."

March 1-3: "Boydton, Virginia Fed ourselves. Played first time on cornet with Mama (Alice Blanche). Return date, fair house."

Sunday March 7: "Made 3 o'clock in the morning train to Kembridge, Virginia Hinton Hotel. Good houses."

March 11-13: "Was to jump to Victoria but light plant broke down in theater so stayed last half of week in Kembridge. Very good houses. Had fine time."

March 15-17: "Victoria, Virginia Light plant still out at Lunenburghof Star Theater. Used lamps. Good crowds."

March 18-20: "Rode 20 miles cross country to Blackstone, Virginia. Awful dump, but good houses. Blackstone Hotel--good. \$1.00 per day."

These notes were consistent throughout Roger Barnes' route books.

The family again jumped from stages to tents when they moved from the Opera House, Farmville, Virginia, where business was good, and joined the tented Bowman show on Sunday, April 11, 1915 for its Saturday, April 17 opening. Clinton and Roger ate and slept on the lot, acquainting themselves with tented operations since they soon would be operating one of their own.

On May 10, as per Roger Barnes' route book, the show made a 15-mile wagon move from Greensboro, North Carolina to Gibsonville, with a horse drawn coach for the acts.



# COMING! COMING!

## THE OHIO MINSTRELS!

21 PEOPLE PRESENTING

OLD TIME MINSTRELSY IN ITS ENTIRETY

INCLUDING

HIGH CLASS BALLAD SINGERS  
BUCK DANCING AND SOFT SHOE DANCING  
ACROBATIC DANCING, FUNNY END MEN  
COMEDIANS WHO PRODUCE A LAUGH A MINUTE

DO NOT FAIL TO HEAR

ALEXANDER'S RAG TIME BAND  
OR FAU TO SEE  
THE AWKWARD SQUAD

TWO HOURS OF REAL FUN AND ENJOYMENT FOR ALL

BRASS BAND CONCERT NIGHTLY  
IN FRONT OF OPERA HOUSE

Admission, Reserved Seats, 35c. General Admission, 25c.

OPERA HOUSE, Georgetown, Del.  
TUESDAY, MAY 21ST.

Handbill used by the Barnes' Ohio Minstrels. Author's collection.

Again, honoring the three-year contract with Jethro Almond, the now heavily augmented Barnes family returned when the Almond show opened in Gastonia, North Carolina on June 14, 1915, featuring their Ohio Minstrels.

In Monroe, North Carolina on Monday, July 26, Clinton Barnes and Irene (Sutcliffe) Kadel were married; Irene was only 16 and Clinton, 21. They were married by a peg-legged justice of peace and they barely made it back to the lot for the opening show.

On the move from Chester, South Carolina, to Gibson, North Carolina on Sunday, October 17, the show train was wrecked, injuring everyone and damaging much equipment. Fortunately, no one was injured seriously. The damaged car was sent to Hamlett for repairs, making a break in the route.

During the unscheduled lay-off the family visited with the Hagenbeck-Wallace and Sparks Circuses. The Coburn minstrels took advantage of the situation to again try to make a deal with Clinton as the Barnes family's 3-year contract with the Jethro Almond Show ended in Florence, South Carolina on November 13, 1915.

The Almond Show traveled on three railroad cars, one Pullman type car divided into staterooms for the staff and performers and the other two cars for the tent, seats, stage, and other equipment, the six donkeys used to pull the gilly



wagons to and from the lot, the gilly wagons and the cook house. No one stayed at the lot except a skeleton crew.

Clinton and Roger and the other actors helped set and strike the tent each week, Roger working the train and Clinton on the lot. Gas lights with mantles lighted the front, house and stage. One year they operated as a 10 cent show but usually admission was 35 cents.

The show featured "Snowball Barnes, The South's Favorite Comedian," and the people looked forward to the show's annual appearance as they did for John Robison's 10 Big.

For the black southern audiences, Clinton honed his Snowball character to perfection. He would spend the days sitting alongside a chain gang (a prison punishment of the time) with pencil and paper, jotting down all the expressions and mannerisms of the southern man, both white and black, which he perfectly transformed to the stage in the character of Snowball.

Clint Barnes had his Snowball character so perfected that after the show the back stage would be crowded with African-American women wanting to meet and date Snowball Barnes. Clint Barnes, himself, after having removed his burnt cork and in street clothes would greet these ladies, apologizing that Snowball left but a few minutes before with some other ladies. No one ever knew that he and Snowball were one and the same.

One thing I must say at this point (and I know this will invite argument). Contrary to belief, the minstrel and black face comedian did not in any way ridicule or down grade the black man. On the contrary, in every situation or gag I have ever seen of these professional black face comedians, the black man had the punch line, which was the last word in outmaneuvering in a comical manner the straight man or the male or female character with whom he was working opposite. The outlandish, zinc oxide white

The inside of the Jethro Almond show was typical of dramatic tent shows. Author's collection.

lips used by amateurs was rarely seen on the professional. Their own lips, however, were exposed to aid the comedian in projecting expression.

During the 1880s and 1890s, minstrel shows produced and performed by blacks gained much popularity and large troupes were formed that toured throughout the country. Two talented African-Americans, Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, produced an all-black show that ran on Broadway, and they showed a caricature of Negro life of the times.

The greatest blackface comedian of all was Bert Williams, a black man who used burnt cork over his own dark skin and with partner George Walker played vaudeville and musicals under the names Williams and Walker. They used Negro dialect and their songs had authenticity that came from characters and situations.

When George Walker died, Florence Ziegfeld co-starred Bert Williams with Fannie Brice in his Follies of 1910. He was a gifted pantomimist and his songs mingled humor, pathos, and poignancy. But his manner was taken from the manner of his people, the same manner used by Snowball.

He was my father's friend and idol, and according to my Dad, no one had ever put over a song quite like Bert Williams, especially the songs *Constantly* and *Nobody* featured in Ziegfeld Follies.

By way of comparison, *Nobody*, written by Will Marion Cook with lyrics by Alex Rogers, and sung by Williams with the right lugubrious touch went in part, "I ain't never done nuthin' to nobody. I ain't never got nuthin' from nobody. No time."

A Snowball song, written and sung by my Dad, giving Snowball's requirements to someone who wanted to test his generosity by borrowing a "couple of fives or possibly tens" went like this: "You'll hafta

stand on your haid and spin around like a top. You'll hafta start into dancin' and never stop. You'll hafta swim that Mississloppi River ever' mornin' at nine, so I'll knows absotively that you're getting along fine. You'll hafta go up to heaven. Jes once. Well, possibly twice. Get the angels all together and shoot a little dice. Come back to earth, and if you turn white, maybe you can borrie yourself a nickel that night."

These days, oddly, society will permit without question the Jewish man, German man, Oriental or Latin man, Bronx or Southern—even the president and heads of state—to be imitated in a satirical fashion; but one cannot imitate the African-American in any way. It was permissible then.

Jethro Almond was a good showman and was involved in many ventures, from a three car railroad show to motion pictures in a small tent permanently located in the center of a small North Carolina town to a very respected circus called Wheeler & Almond with partner Al F. Wheeler. Much of the Barnes family's knowledge of tent show operation was learned from Almond, and many stories emanated from that show. One such story concerns Conney, the boss canvasman.

Conney ruled his working men with an iron hand and he absolutely forbade them from watching the performance. He also made it his solemn pledge to prevent anyone from sneaking beneath the sidewalls to see the show without paying. To accomplish that purpose and to make certain that no one crawled under the sidewalls, he stationed his men around the big top, sitting on guard at the stake. He positioned himself in the marquee so that he could periodically walk part way around the tent to check if the men were sitting at their stations.

Used in the stage show was a stuffed dummy much like the ones used in the clown fire houses of today. The face painted on the head gave it a rather shy look and it was quite overstuffed. Because of this he was called Shy-Fatty.

One of the men asked my father if he could borrow Shy-Fatty for a few hours each night and when he gave the reason, the dummy was instantly turned over to the men.

It was placed in a sitting position at a stake to guard the sidewall at the furthest position from the marquee while the real guard would slip inside to see the show. Conney would look back into the darkness and count the proper numbers of figures sitting guard and was satisfied.

Shy-Fatty watched sidewall almost all of the season while one man at a time enjoyed the show until one night Conney walked around to give some instructions. When it didn't answer, the boss canvas-

man pushed his shoulder and the dummy fell over, revealing the ruse.

After that restrictions were tougher than ever so the men, to get even, put Shy-Fatty on his knees with head and shoulders beneath the sidewalls, as if watching the show beneath the walls, the real guard hiding behind the tent.

Conney's ire was stirred up when he looked down the stake line and saw someone encroaching beneath his sacred side walls.

He stormed down and kicked Shy-Fatty in the keister, sending him flying. Everyone on the show denied knowledge of the gag.

When the Almond show closed the season on November 13, 1915, C. J. and Clinton Barnes wasted not a minute in booking a series of theaters, opera houses and auditoriums, working through the first of the year. The Ohio Minstrels was changed to a straight variety and vaudeville show called The Barnes Vaudeville Company.

Since Irene was now married to a reliable man of a reliable family, the foster parenthood of Viola Kadel was no longer needed. The Kadels then left to join the Sparks Circus, Viola in the performance doing balancing trapeze, Al playing clarinet in the band. They returned in later years, however.

#### The Barnes Comedy Co.

The old equipment acquired from Taylor Trout was dug out and repaired. It was a 50' tent with one 30' middle, staging, scenery, and with seating for approximately 600 persons on 9-high blues on each side of the tent, extending into the round ends. Reserved, folding, bench-type seating ran down either side of the center poles, leading up to eight feet from the stage. Wiring and a decent marquee was also included.

To both operate and perform in a show this size, it would be necessary to augment the performance with one, preferably two, versatile man and wife teams and other personnel. Rube Snyder with Jesse Wallace and daughter, Ethel, agreed to join from the Almond Show as did Ernest (Slim) Biggerstaff who did an excellent front bending contortion act and who was also quite knowledgeable in the workings of tents as well.

They took time off in St. Matthews, South Carolina to frame the outfit and to wait until spring before opening. With the show ready to go and to build a little extra reserve cash, C. J. booked the show in several theaters on percentage before embarking on their new venture.

Not having trucks, the first few months were by rail. By purchasing a given amount of passenger tickets, a baggage car was given free. A gilly was hired to take the equipment to and from the

tracks. For power the local electrical companies would install a switch box at the marquee, with Clint doing the inside house and stage wiring. While laying off in St. Matthews he had worked with a line company, stretching wire lines across the countryside, and he considered himself an electrician. He apparently was adequate as we didn't burn down.

Business was fair but without the proper paper they couldn't reach enough people and the band at that time wasn't large enough to make an impression at the bally.

The show day and dated the E. K. Sibley show, a railroad carnival of fair size, and C. J. negotiated to book the show in the back end for the remainder of the season, which would add another strong show to the excellent "Jig" and water shows already there. A black show in those days was always called a "Jig show." Prince Nelson did a high wire free act.

E. K. Sibley advertised a good, honest operation with a new ride called the whip, and on the advance paper also advertised the back end shows. Although it advertised a good, honest show, it did, in fact, have many strong flat joints on the midway and graft was plentiful. It was necessary to have good, strong back end shows for the purpose of squaring beefs from customers who lost considerable amounts of money playing games that were impossible to win, and at the same time pacifying the local sheriff and constable and their families by keeping them entertained, happy, and off the midway while the lucky boys operated without surveillance.

The family alone had enough strength and versatility to do the entire show but girls for chorus dancers were hired and

Front of the Barnes Comedy Co. on the Sibley carnival. Author's collection.



trained by Irene to make the openings on the bally platform, and in the show. One was a female impersonator named Elsie who, according to record, was the best looking girl on the show when made up. She made more trouble for the show than graft—not for romantic forays but for fighting. Once standing next to my mother on the bally platform he thought he heard a vulgar remark that was made by a local. Elsie jumped off the bally platform, grabbed the man and laid him out even before his feet hit the ground.

The show would have made good money had C. J. listened to Clint and Roger and shortened the show into a "grind" type operation, adding more performances each night. But he stubbornly held to his convictions that "If the name 'Barnes' is on the front, it will be a show that people will talk about." Therefore, each show lasted about two hours and two were all that could be squeezed in each night.

The Sibley carnival ran all winter and in December, 1916, moved into Florida. Enjoying good business, the show was now netting the family a fair amount of money each week.

Sibley made a run from Lakeland, Florida on the last day of 1916, working down though Ft. Myers and back to St. Petersburg on January 29, 1917. Zig-zagging back and forth through the center of the state it finally exited Florida at Valdosta, Georgia from March 5-10.

World War I had been raging in Europe for two and one half years and the United States was desperately trying to remain neutral. Everyone, including President Woodrow Wilson, knew that the U.S. could not maintain its neutrality for long, and preparations were being made. Conscription was voted in and all men in good physical condition over the age of eighteen were drafted into the army. Clint and Roger were two of those boys to sign

and were waiting for the call to arms. Finally on April 6, 1917, the United States entered "the war to end all wars."

The heat from the graft became too unbearable, even affecting the back end shows, and since the equipment had terribly deteriorated from the long winter grind, the family left Sibley at Siler City, North Carolina, on April 14, 1917, and joined the Piero Vaudeville Tent Theater on April 16. This show, operating under canvas and managed by Mrs. Piero, took time off to reorganize with the new cast members and show. It opened in Hartsville, South Carolina from May 7-12.

The Piero show remained in South Carolina the entire season, closing in Norway, South Carolina from November 12-17. C. J. and Clinton Barnes purchased the complete show and continued the operation under the title The Barnes Comedy Company. The outfit came complete with tent, marquee, stage, seats scenery, lighting and four trucks.

The Barnes Comedy Co. stayed open throughout the winter and in St. Matthews, South Carolina, January 11, 1918, they suffered their first blow-down which shut down operations for two weeks. While Roger, Clint, and Slim Biggerstaff repaired the tent, C. J. moved ahead of the show to book the route.

In Columbia, South Carolina, he was confronted with an extremely expensive show operating license. When Barnes complained and explained that the booking was for one week only, the clerk replied that the fee was the same whether the booking was for one day or one year.

C. J. realized that rationing was already in effect and as difficult as travel was then, soon it would be almost impossible. He was also aware that Clint and Roger could be called to serve in the army any day. Evaluating the situation, he paid the licence and at the same time signed a year's lease on an excellent lot only two short blocks from the State Capital building in downtown Columbia, paying in advance.

Reporting for their army physicals, Clint was rejected due to an injured back resulting from lifting canvas, but Roger was accepted and ordered to report to Camp Jackson (now called Fort Jackson), Columbia, South Carolina, August 30, 1918 for basic training.

#### Enter The Beers Family

The Barnes Comedy Co. quickly moved to Columbia, South Carolina, May 22, 1918, and dug in on the lot expecting a long stay which turned out to be 38 consecutive weeks.

A local band was hired and played a concert each night at the steps of the State Capital building downtown, and after the "pitch" by C. J., would march back to the

lot playing marches with half the servicemen and their dates falling in behind as if in a parade. The tent was filled to capacity nightly for the entire time.

Complying with the policy of a complete change of program each night soon began to wear on the versatility of the troupe and they began to repeat too often. The performance scheduling was then altered to relieve this burden by changing shows twice a week instead of nightly. But even that didn't relieve the pressure on the family and soon they again started to repeat numbers with increasing frequency.

the performance. (Lengthen, yes; strengthen, questionable.)

An ad placed in the *Billboard* for a versatile, musical family familiar with band instruments was answered by The Five Musical Beers, a family who quickly joined from Rahway, New Jersey, where they had been working theaters as an act and playing musical accompaniment for motion pictures.

The family included George Beers; his wife, Anna; two daughters, Ella Elizabeth and Matilda (Tillie); and a younger son, Charles Willis, who was too young for the draft. George Beers' father, George Senior, also joined with the family but traveled as a non-professional.

Beers was a master banjo player who had worked with and was as talented as Eddie Peabody. He and the two girls presented a banjo trio, playing plectrum banjos, with George Beers also presenting excellent banjo solos as did his daughters.

Additionally, the two men and two girls did a number on four xylophones, Ella also doing a single on the instrument. The girls were incorporated in the other performances as well, singing, and blending in with the after pieces and sketches already in use in the show. And Tillie, with Charley in "Silly Kid" make-up, did a hilarious comedy double. (Charley Beers continued to use the "Silly Kid" make-up as a clown on Beers-Barnes Circus instead of the traditional white face.)

The Beers added greatly to the show and gave much needed time between the acts done by the Barnes family. Besides, the addition of two young, attractive girls was a great asset to the almost 100% military audiences.

Albert and Viola Kadel also answered the call and returned to the show, and a young trumpet player named Eddie Mixon from Fitzgerald, Georgia was hired.

Now with formidable musicians on hand it wasn't necessary to hire a local band each night. It now numbered eleven pieces with each Beers girl playing trumpet; the new man, Eddie Mixon, also on trumpet; George Beers and son, Charles, each on trombone; Al Kadel on clarinet; Roger Barnes on baritone; Anna (Grandma) Beers on tuba; Clint Barnes on snare drum; Irene Barnes on bass drum and C. J., resplendent in uniform, as director and announcer.

I must confess that C. J. Barnes was not a band master, nor even a musician, and didn't know a G-clef from a bass clef. But he could follow the band with his baton quite effectively. He would start all the musicians playing together at the same time; he would not bother them during their rendition of the musical number; and most important, he could stop directing the instant the band stopped playing.

## Spring Festival and GALA WEEK ATHENS March 19-24

LUMPKIN ST. SHOW GROUNDS  
**SIBLEY'S SUPERB SHOWS** Founded on Clean Attractions  
Growing on Merit

Furnishing a real treat along pure amusement lines, such as Big Water Circus, Big Museum, Animal Show, Barnes Comedians, Mysterious Ada, Vans 3 in 1, Golden Days of California, etc., beautiful Merry-go-round, gigantic Ferris Wheel, and America's latest and greatest riding sensations—"The Whip"

SUBLIME  
SURPASSING  
SUPERB  
SENSATIONAL

PRINCE NELSON  
Peer of High Wire Artists  
Thrilling FREE ACT

An Original Act  
wholly novel and  
absolutely unlike  
anything ever  
seen before.

Probably the last Carnival in Athens for some time to come. All shows and attractions guaranteed to be entirely free from any obscene or objectionable features

FORGET YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF OTHER CARNIVALS  
COME AND ENJOY A REAL ONE

Sibley newspaper ad listing Barnes Comedians in 1917. Author's collection.

Clinton, Roger and Irene added new vaudeville routines; new singles, doubles and trios. Alice Blanche gave a piano concert, and against everybody's better judgment, C. J. oiled up his basso profundo and sang, much to his enjoyment and everyone else's despair.

They also exhausted their repertoire of one act openers, sketches, and comedy after pieces, such as Peaches; The Man Who Looks Like Me; Too Many Babies; Have a Card; Haunted Hotel; a satire of Romeo and Juliet; Squire Hopkins; Over the River; Charley; Ghost in the Pawn Shop (or Pete in the Well, or The Robbery on 456 Broadway [all the same]); Doctor Shop; Telephone; Snorky, the One Armed Soldier; Crazy House; Three Act Disturbance; Three O'clock Train; Who's on First; and all the burlesque bits they knew, all cleaned up for family audiences.

Clint and Roger then started to write their own sketches, one act playlets and after pieces to lengthen and strengthen

He was a masterful announcer, however, with enough "hype" that usually convinced the public that they couldn't possibly make it through the night without seeing the Barnes Comedy Co. From all I have heard, they apparently believed him as the crowds always followed the band from downtown village square to the lot.

Although the ten piece band was an important and impressive feature when playing downtown, equally impressive was the orchestra that played inside the tent for about half an hour before the curtain went up, similar to the band concerts in the center ring of circuses during the come-in.

The orchestra consisted of Ella Beers and Roger Barnes on saxophones; Tillie Beers and Eddie Mixon on trumpets; Charles Beers on trombone; Al Kadel on clarinet; George Beers on banjo, an important instrument in orchestras in those days; Anna Beers on tuba; Clint Barnes on trap drums; and Alice Blanche Barnes on piano.

Only piano, played by Alice Blanche Barnes and saxophone or trumpet by Eddie Mixon were played during the acts, but for certain acts, Clint would slip into the orchestra stand (more often than not in make-up) and play trap drums for desired effects.

To add to the show, Slim Biggerstaff, besides doing a front bending contortion number, built a trapeze and did contortion trapeze. A double trapeze was also built for Viola Kadel and Slim with Viola carrying Slim while he again did contortion on the hand-held trapeze. Slim also did a slack wire act.

The show was well rounded with singing, dancing, comedy, skits, music, one act plays and after-pieces and novelty acts. The Beers family blended in nicely with the Barnes family, and Roger Barnes fell in love with Ella Beers at the same time Eddie Mixon fell in love with Tillie Beers. (Yes, it was rapidly becoming a well organized family show.)

Roger received notice to begin his military training and he entered Camp Jackson on August 30, 1918.

His absence placed a heavy burden on the show as he and Clint worked almost every number together. They actually were the strength of the show. C. J. substituted for Roger in the doubles with Clinton but it was no comparison as the two boys had worked together since before they were teens and could sense the other's thoughts, and worked as one man.

This inconvenience, however, lasted only a few weeks when a miracle happened in the army camp. During breaks in his training, Roger would often play his baritone horn to keep in practice. One day he was overheard by a colonel who was in charge of all the band units in

Camp Jackson. He complimented Roger on his tone and asked if he could read music. After an affirmative answer he said that the army needed good musicians and bands more than fighting men in order to build up an *esprit de corps* to

**ALPHA THEATER**  
MANCHESTER, GEORGIA  
**ALL THIS WEEK**

**Barnes Comedy Co**  
All High Class Talented Artists, Direct from the  
Laugh Factory, Producing a Laugh a Minute.

**GOOD SINGING, DANCING and COMEDY**

INTRODUCING  
**BARNES BROTHERS**  
In "A MILE OF SMILES"  
Clinton Barnes is the much talked of Buck and Wing  
Dancer, the Man Who Dances Upside Down  
on His Hands.

**IRENE**  
The Singing and Dancing Soubrette  
"THE LITTLE GIRL WITH THE BIG VOICE"

**MR. AND MRS. BILLIE SNYDER**  
"THOSE TWO FUNEDIANS"  
Exponents of Irish Wit and Comedy.

**THE EUREKA TRIO**  
THREE FANCY DANCERS AND SINGERS  
Presenting High Class Songs, Ballads and Dances

Also Tabloid Plays  
And Farce Comedies

AND OUR REGULAR RUN OF ALL-FEATURE  
**PICTURES**

A MORAL AND REFINED SHOW  
This Company comes most highly recommended by  
both press and public as well as theatre managers as  
being one of the best entertainments and cleanest  
shows now being presented to theater goers.

Entire Change of Program Each  
Night

**ADMISSION 10C & 20C**

A vaudeville date played by the Barnes Comedy Co. around 1915. Author's collection.

combat the complacency the nation was exhibiting.

Roger was then transferred from combat training to permanent duty in the camp band where he remained throughout the war. While other band units were being shipped overseas, the band with Roger, being the colonel's favorite, was permanently assigned to Camp Jackson.

This move freed Roger almost every night to return to the show where he performed his roles in army uniform. C. J. Barnes, not tolerating an ordinary uniform on his stage, had a custom designed, tailor made uniform for Roger which was instantly rejected by his colonel who would not permit anything but army issue to be used in public.

During this time Eddie Mixon and Tillie Beers were married.

C. J. purchased a motion picture projector (silent as sound had not yet made an appearance), a screen, and a dozen or so reels of films to capitalize on this new form of entertainment. It was sold as an after-show concert with Alice Blanche playing the accompanying music to add interest to the plot.

This privilege was given to George Beers whose job it was to oversee the setting up and operation of the projector and to sell the concert tickets. For this the Beers family was to receive fifty percent of the gross.

George Beers was a shrewd operator, and soon C. J. and Clint detected a noticeable discrepancy each night between the money turned in and the size of the crowds staying for the concert to see these photo plays.

One night Clinton unobtrusively stood in the marquee and counted the people as they left the tent which proved to be about twice the number as the tickets turned in. C. J. made George Beers aware of this shortage and advised him to clean up his act.

The next night at the end of the concert both George and Anna Beers were raising sidewalls on each side of the tent, yelling to the audience, "THIS WAY OUT! THIS WAY OUT!" to prevent them from exiting through the marquee to again be counted.

Since Roger was getting serious with the Beers girl, Ella, C. J. and Clint allowed it to continue, but kept close watch and had others sell the concert tickets so that the cut wouldn't be too lopsided. When Beers started printing his own tickets—which was quickly discovered—Clint and Slim Biggerstaff started collecting them themselves after they had been sold in order to get a half way decent count.

C. J. then advised Clinton and Roger that in any future dealings with George Beers they should be extremely careful and keep their eyes open. Clinton was aware of the reason for this advice but Roger, now fully in love with Ella, objected, saying he could see no reason for mis-trust of the Beers family.

Using coke burning heaters for warmth the show remained open throughout the winter of 1918; through the November 11 signing of the Armistice treaty which ended World War I; and remained open through Christmas and New Year's.

Crowds were beginning to thin noticeably as the men in Camp Jackson were systematically being discharged, and the civilian population changed from a war footing to normal life. Knowing that Roger, too, would soon be discharged from the service, C. J. and Clint also made plans for the show's return to the road.

#### Author's Note

This article was meant to follow my first article on the American circus in Australia on Cooper, Bailey & Co. which was published in Bandwagon's September-October and November-December 1992 editions. I had intended that these articles would follow each other in quicker succession, but such are the responsibilities of career and parenthood.

The year 1847 saw the establishment of an Australian circus industry, when Robert Avis Radford opened his Royal Circus in Launceston, Tasmania, and colonial circus activity flowered thereafter. Leaving aside the visit of Luigi Dalle Case's little gymnastic troupe during 1841-42, J. A. Rowe's North American Circus was the first American circus company—and the first complete circus company from any country—to visit Australia. Rowe's first visit, in 1852, marked the commencement of the rich association of the American and Australian circus traditions. Despite a healthy colonial circus industry by this time, Rowe's first visit made quite a "splash" in the gold-besotted colonies.

The story of J. A. Rowe and his circus has been documented elsewhere. I do not therefore claim too much originality in this essay, which is more in the nature of a synthesis and updating where necessary of previous research.

#### Introduction

In the period before the Civil War, America was already prominent as a seafaring nation and her ships sailed every ocean and visited each of the great seaports of the world. Enterprising American showmen, ever on the lookout for fresh territories to visit and exploit, first ventured to foreign lands in this era. A circus tour abroad could prove novel, interesting and possibly profitable.<sup>1</sup>

In June 1851, some three years after its discovery in California, gold was found near Bathurst, Australia on the Turon River in New South Wales. The find sparked the great Australian gold rush. The New South Wales finds were excelled by finds the following year near the towns of Ballarat and Bendigo in the adjacent colony of Victoria. The many Australians lured to California in 1849, now returned to stake claims. Germans, Chinese, Italians, Scotsmen and many other nationalities joined the throng. So did many Americans, but not all of them had to scour the parched Australian earth to find gold. Rich pickings awaited competent entertainers for entertaining the "diggers" as the Australian gold miners were called. Many American entertainers and troupes slipped across the Pacific to chance their luck in the "fabled land" that lay in the

# The American Circus and Australia ROWE'S NORTH AMERICAN CIRCUS Its Australian Tours and Their Aftermath

By Mark St. Leon

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south seas, among them, Joseph Andrew Rowe and his circus.

#### Joseph Andrew Rowe

An equestrian and showman, Joseph Andrew Rowe (1819-1887) was a native of Kingston, North Carolina. Orphaned at eight, he ran away with a circus in 1829, gaining experience as a trick rider and manager. His travels took him through the eastern and southern United States, Cuba, the British West Indies and Central and South America.<sup>2</sup> By the time gold was discovered in California, he was in Lima, Peru at the head of his own circus. Rowe and his company shipped for San

A handbill used by Joseph Andrew Rowe.



Francisco and there, on 20 October 1849, he opened his Olympic Circus to a restless, gold-mad population.

To cater to the San Franciscans and the '49ers, Rowe constructed an amphitheater (apparently covered with a large tent for a roof) that could seat as many as 1500 people. His little company included his wife, also an accomplished equestrienne, the young equestrian prodigy Master Raphael, an Italian couple who excelled at rope dancing and a complement of clowns.<sup>3</sup> The equestrian pieces

presented nightly in the Olympic Circus, such as *The Peasant's Frolic*, *The Indian Hunter* and others, confirmed the As-tleyian origins of the American circus.

This San Francisco newspaper review appeared on November 1, 1849: "San Franciscans have public amusement and a place of evening resort at length. Rowe's Olympic Circus opened on Monday evening last to a crowded audience, and the performance gave ample satisfaction if we are to judge from the frequent and uproarious bursts of applause with which the varied entertainment was greeted. The house has been plainly though comfortably fitted up and will conveniently seat from twelve to fifteen hundred persons. It consists of a pit and tier of boxes set apart and planned for the uninterrupted and full enjoyment of the sports of the ring and is, altogether, a place of amusement, arranged with a degree of comfort which we were quite unprepared to meet. Mr. Rowe is a graceful and practiced rider, and appears advantageously in the habiliments and in the exercise of his profession. Mr. Foley, albeit his legitimate sphere is that of a dashing rider, makes a very clever clown, and the company generally though requiring practice, evince decided talent. Mrs. Rowe is a female equestrian of pleasing merit, and her appearance called forth warm applause. The performance on the *corde elastique* were truly excellent, and particularly have we to commend the fearlessness and grace of Senora Levero. The 'Thunders of Applause' with which her execution of most difficult feats, was received, were indeed merited.

"Mr. Rowe has attained a high degree of excellence in the training of his horses. His favorite, Adonis, is the very paragon of sagacity, obedience and docility. Seldom have we seen a more perfectly tutored animal. The pony Billy is another evidence of that remarkable proficiency in the education of a horse which skill, care and good treatment on the part of the master will accomplish.

"Mr. Rowe's circus entertainments will

relieve the tedium of many an approaching long winter evening, and we congratulate our citizens on the establishment of a place of amusement in our midst under such favorable auspices."<sup>4</sup>

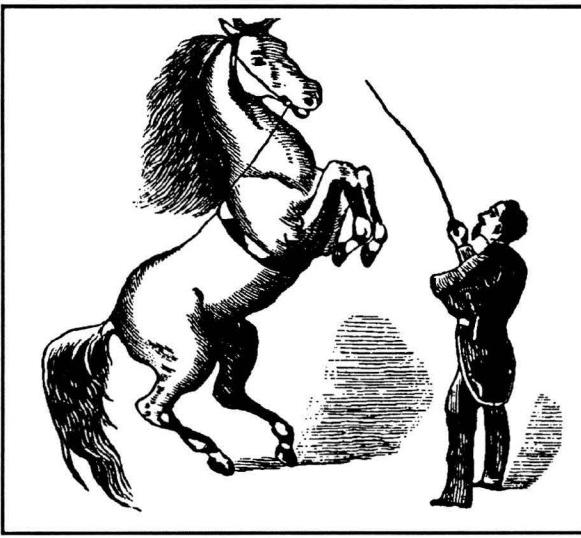
Favorably received by the San Franciscans, Rowe's Olympic Circus had evolved by February 1850 into a combination circus-theater. When San Francisco's newly opened theaters began to offer competition, Rowe shrewdly supplemented his equestrian exhibition with regular productions of plays.

In May 1850, Rowe shifted location to Sacramento. His programme was as attractive as any of the day. First, his orchestra played the Overture to *William Tell*. There was then a "Grand Star and Waltz Entree, on six horses, led by Mr. and Mrs. Rowe," after which Mr. Rowe danced his celebrated horse Adonis "to the favorite tune of Yankee Doodle." Next, Master Raphael, the "Little Rising Star," executed his "daring equestrian feats" and Mr. Rowe presented Adonis again in *The Indian Hunter and his Wild Charger*. Later in the programme a Dr. Downs performed "the laughable scene of *The Peasant's Frolic*" in which the clown "took an active part on the noble horse Napoleon." A Mr. Burke danced a Sailor's Hornpipe. Rowe was featured on horseback in *The American Tar*. The evening's entertainment concluded with "The very laughable pantomime of *The Cobbler's Daughter* performed on stage."

Rowe's next enterprise was to open a new Olympic Amphitheater in San Francisco. This he did in mid-August 1850. William Foley offered stiff competition with an establishment described as "well worth a visit from every lover of beautiful horsemanship or innocent amusement." Rowe felt the pressure. By the end of 1850, he announced that his troupe was about to leave for the Sandwich Islands, whence it would go on to China. Said the *San Francisco Herald*: "He carries on his novel route the best wishes of a community who appreciate talent combined with gentility."

#### First Australian Visit

In the spring of 1851 Rowe and his company sailed from San Francisco—but with Australia, not China, as their ultimate destination. Three years were to pass before their return to California. Rowe chartered the ship *Leveret* to carry his company to Honolulu. The company played before King Kamchamcha and large houses of delighted natives. The visit was profitable enough for Rowe to buy the 200 ton brig *General Worth*. On 12 December 1851, Rowe's circus sailed in it for



Joseph Andrew Rowe depicted in an advertising drawing.

the Society Islands (now Tahiti), arriving there in January 1852. Another profitable series of performances was given. The company then sailed for New Zealand. After a rough passage, it arrived at Auckland on 24 March 1852. Money was scarce in the new British settlement. Rowe's circus played only a short time there before setting sail for the volatile new gold city, Melbourne.

Rowe arrived in Melbourne on 1 May 1852, with his wife and six equestrians, namely Master Raphael, R. Stevens, W. H. Fuller, W. Wescott and two others. At first, Rowe rued the decision to try Melbourne. It cost 3 pounds 10 shillings a night to stable his 10 horses. Attempts to establish the circus were frustrated despite applications to the Colonial Secretary and the superintendent of police, and an exchange of letters in the *Argus*. The mayor, John Thomas Smith, was also the proprietor of Melbourne's Queen's Theater. Understandably, he opposed any entertainment that might pose competition.<sup>5</sup> People living near the proposed circus protested that "it would be injurious to their property, and the peace and comfort of the neighborhood." The *Port Phillip Herald*, outraged at the disgraceful treatment Rowe received, called for an end at once to the "dilly-dallying about the matter." One hundred and fifty "respectable inhabitants" agreed. William Westgarth led them in petitioning in support of Rowe's application to erect an amphitheater at the corner of Stephen (now Exhibition) and Lonsdale Streets. The police court unanimously granted permission because the circus "would tend to diminish crime and facilitate the operations of the police" being also "beneficial to the community as tending to draw par-

ties away from public houses and dissipation."

The *Melbourne Argus* commented: "It will be seen by our issue yesterday that Mr. Wroe (sic) has at last succeeded in securing a licence for his equestrian performances; and as he has been exposed to considerable delay and expense, in a very innocent endeavor to furnish the citizens of Melbourne with rational amusement, we trust that when he gets fairly started he will meet with an ample return in public sympathy. And we also hope when people in places so distant as New Zealand, next advise caterers for public recreation not to come to Victoria because 'the Mayor of Melbourne is the proprietor of the theater, and will not allow anyone to interfere with him,' that they will accompany that information with the announcement that Melbourne also contains a poor little daily paper always open to the appeals of the unoffending, the stranger and the persecuted; and that there is a public in Melbourne which, whenever its attention is aroused, will not allow a man to be crushed or ruined, who has done nothing to deserve such a fate."<sup>6</sup>

By the following day, the sides were nearly up and a heavy canvas roof ready. The opening on 28 June created "no little sensation throughout the city" and the fifteen hundred who squeezed into the 800 seat structure were full of praise for this, the first entertainment by an American circus in Australia.

This is how one Melbourne newspaper witnessed the opening of Rowe's Equestrian Circus: "The opening of the circus recently erected by Mr. Rowe, at the junction of Lonsdale and Stephen Streets, which took place last evening, created no little sensation throughout the city. At an early hour of the day so great was the demand for tickets, that the proprietor, under the impression that the building would not comfortably accommodate more than eight hundred persons, was compelled to refuse supplying the numerous demands which were made upon him. The building, which has been erected at a cost of nearly one thousand pounds, is about 260 feet in circumference; the ring in which the equestrian exhibitions take place, is probably about 150. The accommodation for the public are excellent, either in the pit, boxes or the dress circle, the latter being fitted up in a most magnificent style for the reception of the first families in the colony. Prior to the doors being opened, the excellent Saxe Horn Band, whose services have been engaged for the season, enlivened the scene, and continued to do so at intervals throughout the evening. The build-

ing was crowded to suffocation upon the opening of the doors, notwithstanding which, the utmost good order prevailed throughout the entertainments. Of the amusements themselves, we cannot speak too highly. The efforts of Ducrow, Batty, and the exhibitions at the far-famed Astley's dwindled into insignificance when compared with those which, through the enterprise of Mr. Rowe, have been provided for us."

The *Herald* was sure Rowe would make large profits. The intelligence that Rowe's horses displayed in executing difficult figures under the guidance of their riders impressed a writer for the *Argus*, recalling the glories of London's Astley's. Mrs. Eliza Rowe was "an accomplished and elegant equestrian" and the locally engaged clown Edward Yeamans, "one of the very best."

If Rowe reaped a harvest from the pockets of Californians, he found things equally prosperous in Melbourne. His immediate success, although assured, did not eliminate competition. There was already considerable circus talent, largely British in origin, in Australia at that stage. The British circus man, J. S. Noble, opened his circus in Melbourne in October 1852, his company featuring the equestrian John Jones and his troupe that included a young Aboriginal rider named "Nugget."

The Melbourne press was full of comments about Rowe and his circus. For example: "AMUSEMENTS—ROWE'S AMERICAN CIRCUS.—This place of equestrian entertainment has had a triumphant week. On Monday, His Excellency, the Lieutenant-Governor, favored Mr. Rowe's Circus with a visit to an afternoon performance, which was also attended by a crowded and fashionable company. Mr. Rowe made every possible preparation to do honor to the occasion, and his Excellency expressed himself much gratified with the arrangements provided. The performance, besides introducing some new and gorgeous dresses and decorations, did not differ materially from the usual evening's programme. We understand these afternoon exhibitions are to be continued, and will no doubt be fully attended by many of the population who do not like to face the night air." So impressed was the Lieutenant Governor with Rowe's Circus that he attended it again the following week.

Rowe has honored during the run: "TESTIMONIAL TO MR. ROWE.—One of the neatest specimens of Colonial artistic skill, a memorial medal, intended for presentation to Mr. Rowe might live long to possess the gift. At the time of the presentation, Mr. Warner and Mr. Rowe stood on the stage in front of the orchestra and were surrounded by the members of

the Company in the costume in which they had appeared in the entree. Mr. Rowe made a pithy and very appropriate reply, after which the beautiful present was handed round by Mr. Brewer to the audience for inspection. A greater number of persons were present, and more money was taken at the circus on Monday evening than on any previous occasion since the establishment was opened."

One notice indicated that Australian circus fans were on occasion more than a little rowdy: "BENEFIT FOR THE HOSPITAL.—Mr. Rowe handed over to Alderman Nicholson, for the benefit of the Hospital, a check for two hundred and twenty-two pounds, as the proceeds of Monday night's entertainment at the circus. We need hardly say that the house was crammed to excess on the occasion, and we were pleased to see that much better order was preserved than on any previous occasion. It certainly is not so much the fault of Mr. Rowe, that disturbances occasionally take place, as he has a strong body of police always on duty, whom he pays very liberally for their services. A little more activity on the part of these officials, and a little more determination on the part of the audience themselves, in seeing decorum preserved,

Rowe 1857 program used in San Francisco.

## Third Night! ROWE'S PIONEER CIRCUS! CORNER FIFTH and M STREETS.

   
The Performances of this popular  
Equestrian Establishment have been highly received with  
the heartiest applause and the most intense admiration!

Joseph A. Rowe . Proprietor and Manager  
H. W. Franklin . . . Equestrian Manager  
J. R. Marshall . . . . . Riding Master  
Nat Austin . . . . . Shaksperian Jester  
Hiram Franklin . . . . . Clown

PRICES OF ADMISSION:  
Boxes..... One Dollar. Pit..... Fifty Cents.  
(Upper half of facsimile program)

would effectually put a stop to the annoyance we have mentioned."

Rowe's showmanship and the quality of his company were not necessarily superior to those of Noble or other circus proprietors in Australia at that stage, just dynamically "American." Rowe reinvested some of his proceeds in an eight room house made of iron that he erected on an adjacent lot. Within it, he opened his "American Bar, Supper, Oyster and Refreshment Establishment." Thursday nights at the circus were reserved for shows arranged exclusively for families. The bills underwent constant revision with the addition of new performances. Popular musical concerts were given on Saturday evenings. Rowe and his company triumphed during their two year stay in Melbourne and found no need to visit the other colonies adjacent Victoria.

The benevolence of the "courteous North Carolinian" won the heart of the Melbourne public. Not all the profits of the American circus went to its owner. Rowe's generosity towards charitable causes such as the Melbourne Hospital, the Benevolent Asylum and the Soldiers' Wives Fund stood "altogether unrivalled." His generous patronage of Melbourne's benevolent institutions was remembered for many years after, references to his munificence still appearing in the early 1900s.

Due to poor health, Rowe finally closed his circus on 25 October 1854. He, his wife and company departed Melbourne, reportedly taking 40,000 pounds in cash and numerous chests of treasure. They arrived in San Francisco later that (northern) spring to a popular welcome. At a banquet in his honor, his friends bestowed the title of "Colonel" upon him.

### California Return

For a time, Rowe was occupied with the 13,500 acre Santa Anita ranch. Located east of the San Gabriel mission near present day Los Angeles, he purchased the ranch for \$33,000. But Rowe's life as a rancher was short, mainly because of heavy financial losses.

Despite a financially depressed California, Rowe again entered the field of active exhibition and on 8 March 1856, in partnership with John W. Smith, Rowe & Co's Pioneer Circus opened in San Francisco. The company included William Worrell as clown. Joining later were the famous acrobat and rider Burnell Runnels, the fine clown William F. Wallett, and other artists especially imported from the eastern seaboard. A disastrous tour of mining camps followed during the summer.

Rowe and Company's Pioneer Circus briefly reopened in San Francisco on 14 October 1856. Among the riders was Ra-

phael. A portion of the troupe went on to Honolulu in November 1856 for a visit of several months. On 25 March 1857, Rowe & Company's Pioneer Circus opened in San Francisco again. J. R. Marshall was ringmaster. The company included James E. Robinson in Herculean feats with cannon balls, and James Hernandez as a rider.<sup>9</sup>

Again, Rowe decided to tackle the gold mining centers. The 1857 tour, which included such promising stands as Placerville, Rattlesnake and Gold Hill, only forced Rowe further into debt as the rival Lee & Bennett's North American Circus (which starred James Hernandez, the "unrivalled American horseman") undercut his own. Meanwhile, California's financial malaise continued. Historian Chang Reynolds noted: "Many tales of disaster have been told of the pioneer efforts of eastern circus managers but their routes must have been relatively smooth compared to Rowe's wagon tours through those rough Sierra mining centers located in some of the most rugged country in the world."<sup>10</sup>

Although burdened by debt, Rowe refused to mortgage his Santa Anita ranch. As a result, his creditor, John Center, took possession of the Pioneer Circus. It opened in San Francisco on 12 September 1857, embellished with talent drawn from Lee & Bennett's North American Circus. One of the features of the program was a riding contest between the newly arrived, Australian equestrian, James Melville, of the North American Circus and James Hernandez.

Some months later, Center gave Rowe an option to buy back the circus stock and paraphernalia, evidently to encourage him to try to recoup his fortune with another tour of the south seas and Australia. Rowe borrowed \$3000 on his wife's jewelry and entered into partnership with John R. Marshall, a musician and comedian. With Henry Charles Lee, Marshall had started the National Circus (Rowe's chief competitor in the early 1850s) but had also lost his money in speculation. Other circus performers were glad to join them, including Hernandez (once paid \$100 weekly but now "living on his woman") and William Worrell, a talented clown who had resorted to "shooting ducks" for a living.

Rowe & Marshall's American Circus reached Honolulu in January 1858. From Honolulu, on 7 February 1858, "Colonel" Rowe wrote to Center of "business and things in general." They had missed the whaling fleet and so takings were poor.

For seven nights receipts totalled only \$1980 and expenses were \$250 a day. Some of the company were troublesome. He went on to tell Center that [original

spelling] "Frank Whittaker and Hernandez has been drunk ever since they have bin here, and Frank & wife talks of . . . stopping here, and in all probability Mr. Raphael will stop here too, they are



Mary Ann Whittaker appeared in Rowe's 1856 performance.

both two sweet cented scoundrels." Fortunately, Marshall was a "good partner so far" and his morale remained high. "I am Joe A. Rowe again and mean to remain so with full will of GOD. I feel in a manner happy, although I am not making money at present but there is no such thing as fail with me now." Rowe and his little company continued across the vast expanse of blue ocean that lay between Honolulu and Sydney. Despite his misgivings, Hernandez and Raphael were with him all the way.

#### Second Australian Visit

What Rowe did not appreciate in planning his second tour of Australia was that the great gold rush had all but finished. Much gold was still won from the ground but the heady days of the early 1850s were no more. Imbued with more wealth and sophistication than could have been imagined only a few years previously, the pleasurable tastes of colonial city folk had diversified. As the gold fever quietened, a lively theater and other intellectual pursuits became apparent. A colonial circus could no longer stay indefinitely in one place. To find their real audiences, the Australian circus men had to push far into the hinterland, as far as the bounds of new settlement and inland trade routes would permit, and grapple with the difficulties of distance, weather and other logistics that confronted their profession.

At Sydney's Prince of Wales Theater on 10 May 1858, Rowe & Marshall's American Circus Company opened to a full house. Promoted as the "American Am-

phitheater," the company was under the joint management of Rowe and Charles V. Howard. The *Sydney Morning Herald* thought the bill so good "that the popularity of the troupe will increase as the season advances." *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, with Mrs. Rowe as Countess Malvino, supplemented the normal fare. Despite the *Herald's* optimism, Rowe wrote Center to say that [original spelling] "we have don nothing here, barely paid our way. . . . things is very different here to what they wore when I left this country but in Melbourne times is better I am told, and if we can manage to spend winter we will be able to travel next summer."

In Melbourne, Rowe's circus establishment of 1852 was no more. It was sold by auction late in 1854 after the company's closing, realizing only 60 pounds. The Victoria Theater had been erected on the site but this was also demolished to make way for the new Olympic Theater, the so-called "Iron Pot" of colonial theatrical impresario, George Selth Coppin. Rowe obtained a lease on a disused market and opened it as the American Hippodrome, probably in July 1858. The company starred the riders Young Raphael and the renowned James Hernandez, the clowns Charles De Vere and Adams, Mesdames Rowe and Marshall, Miss Griffiths, Master Armstrong and Mr. Palmer.<sup>11</sup> The orchestra was under the baton of Charles Eigenschenk. Early in July 1858, the Australian performers, Bird and Barlow, augmented the company and it opened on the familiar site in Lonsdale Street. Hernandez and Master Raphael, the original juvenile rider of Rowe's Olympic Circus, starred as equestrians in the ring. The clowns included Ned Yeamans (relieved to have work at 5 pounds a week) and Charles De Vere, who had appeared with Yeamans at Astley's. There were none more worthy of patronage declared the *Age*, as their great skills gained favour and vice-regal support "without resorting to any extraordinary puffery."

A tour of Beechworth, a gold mining center in north eastern Victoria, and other diggings yielded Rowe good returns, especially at the newer fields. Early in 1859, the company, under J. A. Rowe's sole proprietorship, toured Tasmania. When it returned to Melbourne, it reopened in Lonsdale Street on 21 May 1859 as J. A. Rowe's Hippodrome. The celebrated American clown William Worrell, Madame Henriques, J. C. Smith, and Messrs. Stebbing and Tate had joined the company in the interim.<sup>12</sup> But now Rowe had hit upon hard times and Melbourne's *Argus* felt obliged to speak out in his support: "Mr. Rowe deserves well of the public of Melbourne. His energy as a spirited circus

conductor and his liberality towards some of our benevolent institutions, have not passed the re-collection of those who know him in his more prosperous days."<sup>13</sup>

For the new season at the Hippodrome, the ingenious bill was reportedly impossible to fault: "He has exercised so much taste and judgement on the order of his amusements and has been so careful to ensure excellence in his artistes that the interest increased in each successive act." All his efforts were in vain. In August 1859, the Collingwood *Observer* denounced attempts by four of Rowe's countrymen to undermine his position. It called upon the Melbourne public to side with a man "so long and so deservedly respected." Rowe had already seen the best of his Australian visits. He fell ill and was the recipient of a crowded benefit, the second since his return. Impoverished in health and in pocket, Rowe's efforts to make up his Californian losses collapsed.

William Worrell, "a fellow of infinite jest," assumed management of the circus on 8 August 1859. Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Rowe left Melbourne with just enough money to get back to San Francisco under markedly different circumstances from 1854. The Santa Anita ranch was sold. Rowe was not short of work, however. He was much sought after, not only in the circus and menagerie line, but as an engraver. Wood engraving he had learnt while young as a part of the circus business. Rowe was later employed by the Scottish-born circus proprietor, John Wilson, as a ringmaster. Rowe visited Australia one last time in 1873 as one of the agents of Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus. He spent the remaining years of his life as a horse trainer, dying in obscurity in San Francisco on 3 November 1887.

#### Worrell and Company's North American Circus

Now promoted as Worrell and Company's North American Circus, Rowe's former company undertook an overland tour to Sydney. On 16 and 17 December 1859 the combination appeared in Yass "in their mammoth pavilion at the rear of the White Horse Inn."

On 21 January 1860 the North American Circus opened in King Street, Sydney in the same building formerly occupied by Rowe's Hippodrome. It was now redecorated and renamed the Prince of

Wales Theater, and was leased to a former "conspirator" against Rowe, B. D. Clarke. The new circus received an enthusiastic welcome. An advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on that day announced: "Mr. William Worrell, the justly styled King of Clowns, acknowledged by the European, American and Colonial Press as the Prince of Jesters, will appear nightly." A Mr. Denning was bandmaster. The same Master Raphael who Rowe had introduced to California in 1849, and subsequently Australia, as a boy prodigy was there too. He was now Mr. Raffaelle (sic) "the acknowledged champion rider of the world in bare-

making their first American reappearance there in a "regular" theater, the Metropolitan. By 1870, William Worrell was living in New York, where he died in 1897.<sup>16</sup>

#### Gardiner's American Circus

Comprising "sixty men and horses," Gardiner's Great American circus arrived in Sydney in procession to give performances at Sydney's Lyceum Theater between 28 April and 25 May 1862. On the day of its opening, the circus was announced to make "a Grand Entree into the city this morning at 10 am preceded by their Gorgeous Musical Chariot, containing their celebrated Brass Band and drawn by ten horses driven in hand."<sup>17</sup> The agent was Charles Jones. Members of the troupe included J. L. Smith as equestrian manager, E. Yeamans as jester, D'Albert as bandmaster, Madame Yeamans, the Wieland Brothers, Walter Burton and the English tightrope walker Herr Christoff.<sup>18</sup>

Gardiner's American Circus reopened at Sydney's Lyceum Theater on 15 September 1862, an advertisement for the cir-

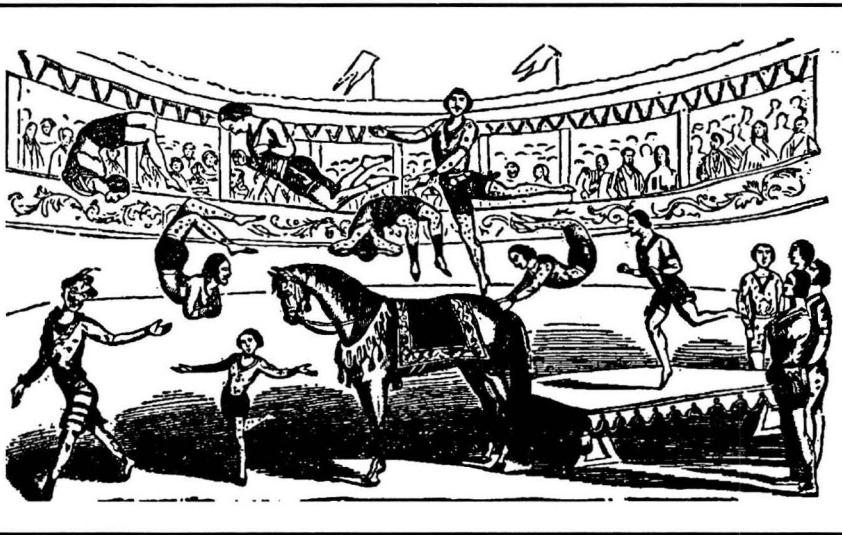


Illustration showing the inside of the Rowe arena in San Francisco.

backed riding." This time, Raphael was to remain in Australia. Worrell's three daughters, later to win acclaim in New York, were a "hit" and the new Prince of Wales consistently boasted houses rare for a minor theater, over eleven thousand people visited the Worrell company in one week it was claimed.<sup>14</sup> This, however, did not ensure financial success for its lessee, who was the host of the prestigious Tattersall's Hotel and one time owner of the Estafette Coaching Company. The Prince of Wales fell into the hands of Samuel Colville when Clarke's theatrical speculations got him 1500 pounds into debt.

The Worrell company shipped for Melbourne by the *Wonga Wonga* on 22 February 1860. In mid-1860, Worrell entered into partnership with another American, Charles C. Gardiner.<sup>15</sup> Their troupe, comprising ninety men and horses, visited Wangaratta and Albury in November 1860. By early 1862, Gardiner had assumed sole direction of the circus. The Worrell family returned to San Francisco,

boasting that its "Splendid brass band is composed of artists of the highest musical capabilities under the direction of D'Albert the celebrated musical conductor." The company was substantially the same as when in Sydney previously except that mention was also made of the "maître du cirque," Charles Walsh and the American jester, W. H. Foley. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, impartially I presume, observed that: "Mr. Gardiner's troupe is the largest and most complete equestrian establishment now in these colonies."<sup>19</sup>

The circus left Sydney for Newcastle on 8 October 1862, then went north to Singleton, where it appeared on 22 and 23 October 1862. The *Singleton Argus* commented: "The tent or marquee is of extensive dimensions, and the sittings are got up capitally for the time allowed. The circus must assuredly be of great moment for everything is on the grandest scale for a travelling affair; the most complete and richest that we ever remember to have seen in the colony and decidedly the best."<sup>20</sup>

From Singleton, Gardiner took his company inland to Mudgee, and then turned south to re-enter the colony of Victoria later that year. The appearance of Gardin-

er's Circus in Geelong, Victoria during March 1863 is the last known reference to the company.<sup>21</sup> Thereafter, Gardiner's name disappears from Australian circus annals and he becomes as obscure as he was before. Several members of Gardiner's company appeared with the premier Australian colonial circus of the era, Burton's National Circus, when that company opened in Melbourne a few months later.

#### Aftermath

So, J. A. Rowe left an impression on Australian circus that lasted beyond his two visits. His first visit was a magnificent success—and a magnificent achievement for the time. His second visit, although a failure, saw the remnants of his company blossom through successive managements before finally being subsumed into the colonial industry.

Of the performers who Rowe introduced to Australia, one is worthy of particular note: the rider H. P. Raphael. Raphael remained in Australia and appeared as an equestrian with nearly every colonial circus of note during his long career. His children carried on in Australian circus into the early years of this century.

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#### Footnotes

1. Sturtevant, C. G., "Foreign Tours of American Circuses," *Billboard*, 2 July 1927, page 41.

2. Joseph Rowe appeared as an equestrian with Yeaman's Circus that toured South Carolina and Georgia in 1831; as a rider with the Joseph D. Palmer circus in 1833; as rider and clown with Buckley &

Co's Circus in 1834 and with Buckley Weeks & Co's Mammoth Circus in 1835; as rider with John Mateer's Southern Circus in 1843; and as co-proprietor, with Duriastus Rich, of Rich and Rowe's Circus in 1844, which departed for South America in the spring of that year. Information from Stuart Thayer's *Annals of the American Circus, Volumes II and III*.

3. The spelling of Raphael's name varies. I have chosen to use this spelling throughout the essay as this appears to be the spelling that he settled on.

4. Dessler, Albert, *California's Pioneer Circus*, 1926, p. 9.

5. It is on record that Smith forced the proprietor of Melbourne's first circus,

Thomas Hayes, to open in 1849 without a licence. Hayes was able to circumvent the illegality by opening his circus as a riding school and insisting that each person attending purchase a cigar for two shillings and sixpence.

6. *Argus*, 10 June 1852.

7. Jones was the founder of the St. Leon circus family and the author's great-great-grandfather.

8. Dessler, Albert, *California's Pioneer Circus*, 1926, p. 17-19.

9. Robinson, not to be confused with the rider James Fitzgerald Robinson, was in Australia in 1855, when he appeared at Ashton's Royal Amphitheater in Sydney.

10. Reynolds, Chang, *Pioneer Circuses of the West*, Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1966, p. 29.

11. Charles De Vere was born in Boston in 1823. At the age of sixteen he joined Turner's Circus and toured the West Indies with that troupe. Except for a brief retirement in the years 1849-51 he re-

mained in circus and travelled all over the world. He died in San Francisco on 7 July 1868.

12. The popular clown William Worrell made his debut in Philadelphia on 3 November 1851 at the Old National Circus. In 1858 Worrell and his three young daughters visited California giving their first appearance in San Francisco at a popular place of amusement as vocalists and danseuses. There followed an engagement with the circus of Messrs Lee and Bennett. Billed as "The Best Clown in the United States, with his Juvenile Graces, Sophia, Irene and La Petite Jennie" the circus management declared that the Worrell name would be "a sufficient guaranty that wit without coarseness, fun without vulgarity and mirth without end will characterise the comic department of the exhibition." A tour of Australia by the Worrell family ensued where, in Melbourne in May 1859, Worrell was engaged as a clown at Rowe's Hippodrome.

13. *Argus*, 23 May 1859.

14. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January 1860.

15. Hardly anything is known of Charles C. Gardiner. This was his only known association with Australian circus activity. I presume that he was an American, given his diligence in using his middle initial each time his name was published. I note, however, that he rates not an entry in Thayer's *Annals*.

16. *New York Clipper*, 21 August 1897, page 398.

17. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1862

18. The pseudonym of the British tightrope walker George Christopher.

19. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 1862.

20. *Singleton Argus*, 23 October 1862.

21. *Bell's Life in Victoria*, 14 March 1863.

## WANTED!

Photographs, letters, posters, newspaper clippings or any other material relating to Daisy and Violet Hilton (1908-1969), Siamese twins who toured the vaudeville houses in the teens, "Chained for Life." I would like to hear from anyone who has any personal recollections of the Hiltons.

Also seeking to buy side show banners, hand-made ventriloquist dummies, carnival ball toss figures and panoramic circus and carnival photographs.

Write or Phone:

**Dean Jensen**  
165 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202  
(414) 278-7810

**A**ll over Vermont, from early in the morning on the day of the circus, every highway leading to town was thronged with all kinds of vehicles, and the railroads and steamboats brought their share of onlookers. Thousands lined the streets to view the parades that promoted circuses, variously described as "the greatest show on earth," "the very largest and best tented exhibition," and "the highest class circus the world has ever seen." In fact, some of the most famous circuses in the country came through Vermont during the 19th and early 20th century, including P. T. Barnum, Adam Forepaugh, Sells Brothers, and Barnum & Bailey.

Before traffic lights, before cars, before television and cinema, there was little contact by Vermonters with other cultures. People were fascinated by rare and exotic animals and performers who risked their lives in daredevil feats.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the arrival of the circus signified a major community event. In newspaper advertisements and stories, the word "holiday" was used synonymously with circus. For the Adam Forepaugh show of July 26, 1883, the *Burlington Free Press and Times* announced: "To-day will be a sort of general holiday. All the mills will shut down and all hands take in the circus." All over Vermont, stores were closed. Schools were dismissed. Granite sheds were shut down. In Montpelier on circus day, a trial had to be postponed because of the lack of a quorum. An advertisement for the Forepaugh show in the *Rutland Herald and Globe* in 1883 declared: "A Holiday Everywhere!"

A story on the same Forepaugh show in the *Rutland Herald and Globe* of July 26, 1883 noted: "From early dawn until noon every train and boat brought hundreds of people to the city, and long before noon the streets presented a holiday appearance."

A column on Addison County in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 26, 1883 described the festive atmosphere. "The 4-Paw fever has broken out badly here and from

By Angela Patten and Gail Rosenberg

present indications Thursday will be a holiday for Vergennes, and more of her citizens will be able to answer the roll call

This 1883 Forepaugh newspaper ad listed seven Vermont stands. Pfening Archives.

**Why?**



MR.

**FOREPAUGH**

**ANSWERS**

An oft-repeated inquiry. A question frequently propounded to both himself and his agents:

"Why Do You Announce and Advertise Your Coming so far Ahead of Your Appearance?"

To let the people know that ADAM FOREPAUGH is coming with the

**Largest Show**

**IN THE WORLD,**

**WAIT ! WAIT ! WAIT !**  
**On the Way.**

**Only Great Show Coming this Season.**

QUARTER OF A

**HUNDRED PERFORMING ELEPHANTS !**

Thousands Everywhere Flocking to See Them.

On account of the immensity of this establishment, will exhibit only as follows:

**RUTLAND, Wednesday, July 25th.**

**BURLINGTON, Thursday, July 26th.**

**MONTPELIER, Friday, July 27th.**

**WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, Saturday, July 28th.**

**ST. JOHNSBURY, Monday, July 30th.**

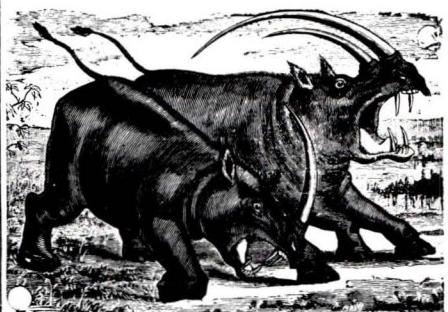
**WEST RANDOLPH, Tuesday, July 31st.**

**ST. ALBANS, Wednesday, August 1st.**

**19TH ANNUAL TOUR OF AMERICA.**

**THE GREAT**

**FOREPAUGH SHOW.**



on that day in the Queen City than in their own bailiwick."

When Ringling Bros. circus arrived in 1894, the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of August 10 stated: "Many went to the exhibition grounds to see the canvas walls and domes go up, but it was not until 9 o'clock that the down-town streets began to assume that peculiar holiday appearance so indicative of circus day."

### A Tremendous Traffic In Tickets

Vast audiences came from far away to see the circus—6,000 attended the Great London Circus in Burlington in 1880; 10,000 attended an afternoon Forepaugh show in Burlington in 1883; and "fully 18,000 people gathered under the monster canvas of Forepaugh's show yesterday" in Rutland that same year.

Barnum drew 15,000 to his sold-out afternoon show in Burlington in 1885; the *Burlington Free Press and Times* reported: "Barnum's latest and greatest show on earth visited Burlington yesterday and the city witnessed the spontaneous outpouring of people that invariably attend Barnum's visits." Ten thousand attended Barnum & Bailey in Burlington in 1891. The *Burlington Free Press and Times* stated in a story on the Ringling Bros. show in 1894 that "the great tent was completely filled at the afternoon performance, and there was a large attendance in the evening." The total was later estimated at 10,000. In 1895, Sells Brothers attracted 8,000 in the afternoon and 5,000 to the evening show in Burlington. "The big tent was nearly filled at the afternoon performance and about two-thirds full in the evening," according to the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 8, 1895.

### Cheapest Excursion Rates Ever!

Special excursions were always arranged to encourage attendance at the circus. Advertisements noted that cheap excursion rates were available on boats and trains. A story on the Forepaugh show in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of 1883 declared that "great numbers of people from the surrounding country and from

across the lake took advantage of the cheap excursion rates to attend. The three boats and all the trains reaching the city in the morning were crowded to overflowing." One reporter noted that "the town was full of strangers." Advertisements in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* for the Forepaugh shows of 1890 and 1892 stated: "Cheap round trip excursions on all lines of travel. Consult local agent." Newspapers reported details of the influx of circus-goers by boat and train: "The Reindeer and Williams brought in about 800 people yesterday, a considerable number being transferred from the *Maquam*, and the *Reindeer* was well loaded." In 1883 the *Vermont* and *Williams* together brought between 750 and 800 passengers to see the circus in Burlington. Special trains were added on the Delaware and Hudson line in Rutland to accommodate those attending the circus: "The four p.m. train for Salem will be held until 5:30; special for Salem and Eagle Bridge at 10:40; for Whitehall at 6 and 10:20."

#### A Class Act

In a preview of the 1887 Barnum and London show a reporter enthused: "It will certainly be a grand exhibition and deserves the hearty support of all classes." In fact, the circus was a great equalizer for people of all backgrounds, ages, and levels of education. From mill workers and merchants to students and clerks, the entire population thronged the streets on circus day. Governor Hale of New Hampshire attended the 1883 Forepaugh Show, and the crew of Dr. William Seward Webb's yacht *Elfrieda* sailed to Burlington from Shelburne Farms dock to see the 1891 Barnum & Bailey show. In referring to an 1887 Barnum and London performance a reporter predicted that "the streets will be thronged with all classes of people to see it."

#### Stupendous, Staggering And Other Superlatives

How could anyone resist the lure of thousands of colorful circus banners, bombastic billboards and alliterative advertisements describing the "peerless, princely, poetic, grand, gorgeous, free street parade" for Forepaugh's 1883 show in Burlington (*Burlington Free Press and Times*, July 25), or stay away from the "grandest, longest, richest street parade ever seen, excelling in magnificence, pomp and splendor the fabled pageants of the ancients, and enticing all the world out of doors to view its grandeur" in Ringling Bros. in 1905. (*Burlington Free Press and Times*, July 17).

All circus advertisements used colorful language to describe the parades and performances. An advertisement in the *Bur-*

*lington Free Press and Times*, July 25, 1883 for the Adam Forepaugh parade proclaims: "40 sun-bright chariots . . . opened dens of wild beasts . . . Lalla Rookh, handsomest woman in America . . . biggest elephant on earth . . . Cashmerian maidens . . . Guards of the Great Kedar Khan . . . Egyptian Pageant . . . Barbaric Glory of Asia . . . Cotton Field Negroes . . . 9-feet high bicycle riders . . . 3 great brass bands . . . all kinds of music . . . all sorts of musical inventions . . . \$2 million parade . . . free for all . . . nothing so grand ever seen . . . no shoddy no sham."

The next day, the Forepaugh advertisement in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* continued in the same vein: "Pronounced by the entire press of [Boston] to be the greatest and grandest tented exhibition ever seen there . . . A mine of marvels! A storehouse of wonders! Transcendent! Tremendous! Worth miles of travel to see! Grand New England Tour! Only great show coming this season! Just added, colossal, imported Roman hippodrome . . . Three colossal circus companies! Three distinct rings! Largest traveling menagerie in the world! 1,000 rare animals! 25 performing elephants in new and wonderful acts . . . 1200 men and horses! Bolivar, Largest and Heaviest Elephant Known to Exist . . .

\$100,000 will be forfeited if any circus in the world can duplicate the unparalleled act of Sig. Le-onati from Milan, racing upon a bicycle up and down a spiral elevated railway 60 feet in height . . . More rare animals than all the shows in America . . . Handsome Women! Wild Men!"

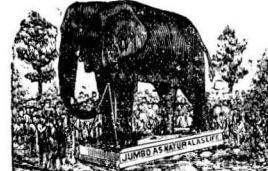
A preview in the *Rutland Daily Herald and Globe* of July 24, 1883 described one of the performers in the same show: "Hindoo Snake Charmer Nala Damajaute is the name of an East Indian girl who is said to be the most wonderful manipulator of venomous reptiles even seen in the new world. Huge pythons encircle her body and deadly cobras wind themselves around her neck, and boa constrictors around her waist. The reptiles do

## BURLINGTON Tuesday August 2. Barnum & London United Shows.

Ten Times Larger and Better.  
Capital, \$4,000,000, Daily  
Augmented and increased by the most mar-  
velous Features and Attractions.  
A Truly Great and Wonderful Exhibition.  
TRIPLE ALLIANCE CIRCUS,  
IN 3 RINGS



Elevated Stage Performances  
Grand Roman Hippodrome,  
WITH THRILLING RACES.  
TWO DOUBLE MENAGERIES  
With Rare Beasts.  
Immense Museum of Living Wonders.



Herds of Elephants,  
Droves of Camels,  
500 Horses and Ponies,  
100 Carriages & Chariots.  
**JUMBO** NATURAL AS  
LIFE.  
And Great Ivory Boned Skeleton.  
**ALICE** Jumbo's Widow and  
Former Companion



her slightest bidding and follow her voice as cheerfully as the dog does its master. She is one of the many features of the great Forepaugh show which is to exhibit here tomorrow."

The Barnum and London ad in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* on July 25, 1887 promised: "Barnum's Show Said To Be Greater Than Ever Before." On August 2, the day of the show, the *Burlington Free Press and Times* stated: "At no time in the history of the world was there ever so many extraordinary objects publicly exposed as those that will be seen in this truly grand procession."

Barnum & London ad used in 1887, Pfening Archives.

Menageries were an important part of the circus and received their share of hyperbole. A Ringling Bros. advertisement in a 1905 *Burlington Free Press and Times* guaranteed: "The biggest, most complete zoological collection in the world, over 100 cages, dens and tanks . . . the only pair of full-grown giraffes ever seen in America. Only rhinoceros in captivity; only North Sea colossal Albino Ice Bear; giant 6-ton Behemoth; curious monster-eared African proboscidian marvel. The world's greatest zoo."

Despite these wildly extravagant promises, the public apparently was not disappointed. The *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 27, 1883 reported: "The great tented exposition of Adam Forepaugh, which gave two performances in Burlington Thursday, is probably the honestest circus that ever visited this city. It gave all it advertised to give and gave it well."

The *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 24, 1885 reviewing Barnum's visit declared: "The street procession was late in getting under way, but when the imposing pageant finally put in an appearance those who had waited so long for a sight were fully repaid." Regarding the show itself, the *Burlington Free Press and Times* said: "The entertainment was by

general consent the finest ever given here."

A review of the Sells Bros. Circus in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 8, 1895 was equally enthusiastic: "The performance, from the grand tournament and triumphant entree to the last hippodrome race, with the two rings and a stage, contained much more than any one pair of eyes could grasp."

#### Exorbitant Expenses And Colossal Costs!

The circus was always willing to impress the public with the enormous expense it had incurred. "Adam Forepaugh makes a claim, which no competing manager has yet ventured to dispute, that in 19 years he has expended \$2,000,000 in the capture, importation and purchase from the Old World Zoological Gardens and in foreign lands of almost every species of animal life that walks, flies, swims or crawls, and that he today owns the most gigantic menagerie in the world. Yearly he claims to expend as much for single animals as some managers do for their entire outfit. The new features this season, besides the herd of 25 Asiatic and African elephants are the first Mandril Gorilla ever captured, and the 'Tamanour' or Great Guinea Ant Bear. But greater than these are one monster single horned and one doubled horsed Rhinoceros, the biggest born on earth. Mr. Forepaugh has good reason to be proud," said the *Rutland Herald and Globe* on July 24, 1883.

Forepaugh's salary list was "undoubtedly the highest of any tented show in the country" and listed the following artists and their salaries: the Silbisons (trapeze artists)-\$400; Leonati (bicycle rider on spiral staircases)-\$300; the Hindu snake charmer-\$200; the Herbert Brothers (tumblers)-\$200 according to the *Rutland Herald and Globe* of July 24, 1883.

Circus advertisements and stories often publicized the vast amount of money owners spent on their productions. An 1883 *Burlington Free Press and Times* advertisement noted that the Forepaugh show had: "Five musical organizations, and the very largest, longest, greatest, grandest, gratuitous, and only Million Dollar Pageant ever seen on the streets."

A preview for the Barnum & London parade in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of August 2, 1887 reported that "the whole cost \$1,500,000," and an ad-

vertisement for Ringling Brothers in the same paper on July 17, 1905 surpassed that amount by declaring "\$3,700,000 capital invested; \$7,400 daily expenses."

#### Burlington Ticket Outlets

Street parades were free and the average price of admission to the circus was

and *Times* were all drug stores.

#### Princely Pachyderms On Parade!

Circus advertisements and performance previews described the parades in glowing detail but sometimes omitted mention of parade routes. The *Rutland Herald* in 1883, however, published a detailed description of the Forepaugh parade route. "We are not positively informed what route the procession of Forepaugh's street exhibition will take tomorrow, but presume that, on account of its great length, and to avoid a collision of its extremities, it will take the following line of march: Through Merchants row to Washington street; up Washington to Main; thence to West; down West to Wales; thence to Center; through Center and Merchants row to West; and thence through Meadow and River Streets to the Pierpoint lot, where the exhibition takes place."

Wherever the location, crowds of people were sure to arrive hours before the parades were due to begin. Advertisements in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 25, 1883 for the Forepaugh show suggested that people arrive in Burlington by 9:30 in the morning to see the "PEERLESS, PRINCELY, POETIC, GRAND, GORGEOUS, FREE STREET PARADE." But in fact, a story the following day reported that "the streets were alive with visitors as early as five o'clock yesterday morning."

Huge crowds also gathered for Forepaugh in Rutland. "Before the day fairly dawned," the *Rutland Herald and Globe* of July 26, 1883 reported, "a large crowd col-

lected in the railroad yard to witness the unloading of the private railroad cars and from that time until the street parade the numbers were swelled by excursion trains, stages and private conveyances from the surrounding country, until our streets were literally packed with spectators, and eligible places on the line of march were scarce." The *Burlington Free Press and Times*, July 23, 1885, reported: "As usual, people began to arrive early yesterday morning, and when the first train of Barnum & London's show got here the station was filled with humanity waiting to see how the many different things were unloaded."

According to Chittenden County historian Leo Fleury, there were two possible sites for the Burlington fairgrounds where circuses set up. These were on North Av-

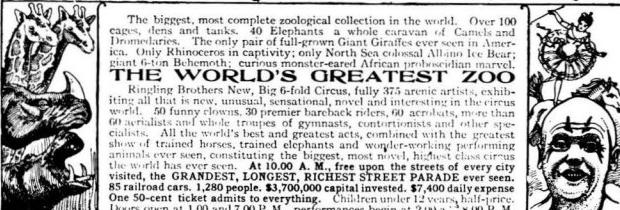
## AUBURN, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 9

POSITIVELY THE ONLY BIG CIRCUS COMING THIS SEASON

# RINGLING BROS. WORLD'S GREATEST SHOWS AND THE STUPENDOUS SPLENDOR-GLISTENING SPECTACLE THE FIELD OF CLOTH OF GOLD

The Most Lavish, Extravagant, Largest, Costliest Amusement Feature Ever Devised. 1,200 Characters, 300 Dancing Girls, a Chorus of 200 Voices, 2,500 Magnificent Costumes. A whole Train load of Armor, Ancient Weapons, Paraphernalia, Banners, Golden Hangings, Scenery and Accessories. A whole City of People. Half a thousand Gorgeously Trapped Horses. A Dazzling Picture of Beauty, Life, Color and Motion.

#### THE GRANDEST SPECTACLE EVER DEVISED



Ringling Bros. ad used in 1905. Pfening Archives.

generally 50c for adults and 25c for children, variously defined as under 9, 10 and 12 years.

The public could always buy circus tickets at the show and some of those who did may have purchased tickets directly from the legendary circus ticket-seller Ben Lusbie. "It is a 'circus' to see Ben Lusbie, the treasurer, sell tickets. He has a record of selling 6,000 in one hour," reported the *Rutland Herald and Globe*, July 23, 1883.

For those who wanted to avoid the crowds at the ticket wagons, tickets were sometimes available in advance at a designated outlet. Venues noted in circus advertisements in the *Burlington Free Press*

enue near North Street or between Flynn Avenue and Howard Street.

Performance sites were sometimes noted in newspaper advertisements, as listed below:

1883: Forepaugh, Pierpoint's Lot, River Street, Rutland.

1883: Forepaugh, The Old Re-union Ground, Burlington.

1890: Forepaugh, Shaw's Lot, Archibald Street, Burlington.

### Pilfering Pickpockets And Pinkertons

The arrival of the circus provided ample opportunity for pickpockets to take advantage of parade- and circus-goers. The *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 26, 1883 cautioned: "The great Forepaugh to-day; Cool and comfortable weather; Beware of thieves and pickpockets." It was a common practice for circuses to allow teams of professional pickpockets to work the crowds, and Forepaugh was known as one of the great grifters in circus history. The following day's paper reported that the notorious pickpocket known as "Oyster Jim" had been caught at the show and brought into the ring for public ridicule by Detective W. H. Henderson of the Pinkerton Agency who was employed by Forepaugh. In fact the arrest was faked. "Oyster Jim" was later spotted working on the circus train as the show prepared to leave town and admitted that he was in Forepaugh's employ.

Thieves often took advantage of the popularity of the circus to rob empty homes. The police were kept pretty busy, yesterday, and a large number of arrests were made. Five inebriated individuals were lodged in jail as early as 10 o'clock in the morning. Several other drunken songsters were added to the assortment later and the concert late at night was enough to take the starch out of a circus poster. D. F. Hatch's house was thoroughly ransacked by thieves during the procession in the morning, drawers being pulled out and small articles scattered around, but the thieves, who entered from the cellar, got only a small quantity of jewelry, valued at perhaps \$25. Edward W. Peck's house had been entered the night before, though little property was taken."

### Pleasure And Puritanism

Of more concern than pilfering and graft to New Englanders in the early 1800s was the suspicion of pleasurable entertainments and their sinful associations. According to Michael Chevalier in *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States*, published in 1836, "all sorts of amusements, which among Europeans are considered innocent relaxations, are here proscribed as immoral pleasures."



Great European newspaper ad used in 1867. Pfening Archives.

A story in the *Burlington Free Press and Times* of July 27, 1883, entitled "Man as a Circus Goer," warned that "It is with circus going as it is with sin. One sin is always followed by a long procession of others. He who once goes to a circus is lost forever."

Vermont had a long-standing reputation as an anti-circus state. As early as 1824, Vermont legislators regulated menageries by imposing fines for appearing in the state unless local governments agreed to license them. In 1836, Vermont expanded the definition to include circuses which were declared to be "common and public nuisances and offenses against the state." Despite the small population, legislative restrictions and bad roads, cir-

cuses still visited Vermont in the first half of the century. Some circuses visited Brattleboro because of its proximity to the New Hampshire line and its location on the route to Montreal.

Vermont was the last state to lift anti-circus legislation in 1933 and, in 1991, the late Governor Snelling issued a proclamation to designate the first week of August 1991 as Circus Week "in order to wipe out any lingering remnant of reputation as an anti-circus state."

Special thanks to Fred Pfening III, Stuart LeR. Thayer, and Fred Dahlinger, Jr., director of the Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center at the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin for their extensive knowledge and support. Thanks to the staff of Special Collections at the University of Vermont for their assistance. We want to express our appreciation to the Chittenden County Historical Society for awarding us the grant to help support this research.

Chronological table of selected circus appearances in Vermont, 1835-1955.

1835

Nathan Howes' Mammoth Elephant, Menagerie and Circus, Brattleboro.

1836

Mammoth Eagle Circus, Bennington, East Village.

J. J. Hall's Mammoth Eagle Circus, Wallingford and Rutland.

The Boston Lion Circus of Buckley & Weeks, Bennington East Village and Woodstock.

1843

Rockwell & Stone, Brattleboro.

1844

Rockwell & Stone, Brattleboro.

1845

Great Zoological Exhibition, Rutland. Rockwell & Stone, Brattleboro.

1847

Sands, Lent & Company, Brattleboro.

1849

Sands, Lent & Co.'s Hippoferean Arena, Brattleboro, Burlington, Milton, Cambridge and Vergennes.

1852

Sands, Quick (Quick Unit), Newport, Brattleboro.

1855

Ballard, Bailey & Company's French Circus, Windsor.

1856

Spalding & Rogers Railroad Circus, Brattleboro.

Jim Myers, Brattleboro.

Flagg & Aymar, Brattleboro.

1857

Sands, Nathans, Brattleboro.

Rivers & Derious, Brattleboro.

1858

Joe Pentland, Brattleboro.

1859

Sands, Nathans, Brattleboro.  
Nixon & Company, Brattleboro.

1860

G. F. Bailey & Company, Brattleboro,  
Wells River.

1861

Madigan's Great Show and Zoological  
Institute, Bennington South, East Arling-  
ton, Factory Point, Danby, Rutland, Bran-  
don, Middlebury, Bristol, Vergennes, Hin-  
nesburg, Burlington, Milton Falls, Cam-  
bridge, Bakerfield, St. Albans, Ben-  
nington, Barton, Lyndon, St. Johnsbury,  
Barnet, Wells River, Bradford, West Tops-  
ham, Barre, Montpelier, Northfield, West  
Randolph South Royalton, Chelsea, West  
Fairlee, White River Junction, Woodstock,  
Windsor, Springfield, Proctorville, Sax-  
ton's River, Townsend, Brattleboro, Wil-  
mington.

1866

Thompson, Smith & Howes, Ludlow,  
Rutland, Brandon.

1867

Great European, Burlington.

1868

Stone & Murray, Bellows Falls, Ludlow.

1870

J. M. French, Bakersfield, St. Albans,  
Burlington, Vergennes, Middlebury,  
Brandon, Rutland.

1871

P. T. Barnum, Brattleboro, Ludlow, Rut-  
land, Bennington.

1873

P. T. Barnum, Rutland, Burlington, St.  
Albans.

1874

P. T. Barnum's Traveling Museum, Me-  
nagerie and World's Fair, Middlebury,  
Burlington, Richmond, Montpelier.

1876

Barnum's New and Greatest Show on  
Earth, Randolph, Montpelier, St. Albans,  
Burlington, Middlebury, Brandon, Rut-  
land.

1879

P. T. Barnum, Rutland, Burlington,  
Montpelier, St. Albans.

Adam Forepaugh, Woodstock, Brad-  
ford, Wells River, St. Johnsbury, New-  
port, Barton, Hardwick, Johnson, Essex  
Junction, Waterbury, Montpelier, North-  
field, West Randolph, South Royalton,  
Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, Chester, Lud-  
low, Rutland, Factory Point, Bennington.

1880

Cooper & Bailey Howes Great London,  
Brattleboro, Rutland, Burlington, Montpe-  
lier, St. Johnsbury, St. Albans.

1881

W. C. Coup, Montpelier.

1882

Barnum & London United Shows, Brat-  
tleboro, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier,

## THE Exhibition of the Period.



### J. M. FRENCH'S ORIENTAL CIRCUS Egyptian Caravan —AND— ANIMAL EXHIBITION, WILL EXHIBIT AT BURLINGTON, MONDAY, August 8, 1870.

Exhibitions Afternoon and Evening, commencing at 2 and 8 o'clock. Doors open one hour previous. Admission 50 cents. Children under ten years 25 cents.

### FRENCH'S Mammoth Exhibition, For presenting the most novel, exciting and elegant Entertainments ever witnessed, has induced the proprietors to engage for the tour of 1870, the best Performers in existence, and the following catalogue of arena celebrities, establishes the truth of the claim that the troupe of this Circus has never been equalled.



MILLE CARLOTTA DEBERG.

J. M. French 1870 newspaper ad. Pfening Archives.

White River Junction, St. Johnsbury, St.  
Albans.

1883

John B. Doris Great Inter-Ocean, Wind-  
sor.

Adam Forepaugh, Brattleboro, Rutland,  
Burlington, Montpelier, White River Junc-  
tion, St. Johnsbury, Randolph, St. Albans.

1885

Barnum & London United Shows, Brat-  
tleboro, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier,  
St. Johnsbury, St. Albans, Bennington.

1886

John B. Doris, Brattleboro, Bellows  
Falls, Windsor, White River Junction, St.  
Johnsbury, Newport, Richland, St. Albans,  
Montpelier, West Randolph, Middlebury,  
Brandon, Bennington, Manchester, Rutland.

1887

Barnum & London United Shows, Brat-  
tleboro, St. Johnsbury, White River Junc-  
tion, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington,  
Rutland, Bennington.

1888

Adam Forepaugh, Bellows Falls, Brat-  
tleboro, White River Junction, St. Johns-  
bury, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington,  
Rutland, Bennington.

1889

Barnum & Bailey, Burlington, St. Albans,  
Rutland.

1890

Adam Forepaugh, Bellows Falls, White  
River Junction, Barre, St. Albans, Burling-  
ton, Rutland.

1891

Barnum & Bailey, Rutland, Burlington,  
St. Albans.

1892

Adam Forepaugh, White River Junc-  
tion, St. Johnsbury, Montpelier, St. Al-  
bans, Burlington, Rutland, Bennington.

1893

Barnum & Bailey, St. Johnsbury, Mont-  
pelier, Burlington, St. Albans, Rutland.

1894

Ringling Bros., Rutland, Bennington,  
Middlebury, Burlington, Barre, Ran-  
dolph, White River Junction, St. Johns-  
bury, Newport, Richford, St. Albans.

1895

Sells Bros., St. Albans, Barre, Burling-  
ton, Rutland, Bellows Falls.

Buffalo Bill Wild West, St. Johnsbury,  
White River Junction, Montpelier, St. Al-  
bans, Burlington, Rutland.

1896

Barnum & Bailey, Brattleboro, St.  
Johnsbury, Montpelier, White River Junc-  
tion, Burlington, St. Albans, Rutland.

1897

Forepaugh-Sells, St. Johnsbury, White  
River Junction, Montpelier, Burlington,  
St. Albans.

1900

Great Wallace, Rutland, Middlebury,  
Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, White River  
Junction, Randolph, Burlington, Montpe-  
lier, Morrisville, St. Johnsbury, Newport,  
St. Albans.

1901

Forepaugh-Sells, Rutland, Burlington,  
Montpelier, St. Albans.

Gentry Bros., Brattleboro, Bellows Falls,

White River Junction, Montpelier, Barre, Burlington, Middlebury.

1903

Barnum & Bailey, White River Junction, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

Ringling Bros., St. Albans, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

1904

Forepaugh-Sells, St. Johnsbury, Newport, St. Albans, Burlington, Montpelier, White River Junction, Bellows Falls, Rutland.

Walter L. Main, Bennington, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier, Cambridge Junction, St. Johnsbury, Newport, St. Albans, Vergennes.

1905

Ringling Bros., St. Albans, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

1906

Barnum & Bailey, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier.

Frank A. Robbins, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, White River Junction, Wells River, St. Johnsbury, Lyndonville, Barre, Newport, Hardwick, Morrisville, St. Albans, Waterbury, West Randolph, Bristol, Brandon, Ludlow, Bennington.

John Robinson, Rutland, Bennington, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, White River Junction, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington.

1907

Forepaugh-Sells, Newport, St. Johnsbury, Rutland, Montpelier, Burlington.

Frank A. Robbins, Bellows Falls, Brattleboro.

1908

Cole Bros., St. Johnsbury, Newport, Richford, St. Albans, Montpelier, Burlington, Middlebury, Rutland, Bennington.

1910

Miller & Arlington 101 Ranch Wild West, Bellows Falls.

Forepaugh-Sells, Bennington, Bellows Falls, White River Junction, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington, Rutland.

1911

Barnum & Bailey, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier, St. Albans.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill Wild West, White River Junction, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

Mighty Haag, Rutland, Bellows Falls, Burlington, Northfield, Waterbury, St. Albans, Hardwick, Cambridge.

John H. Sparks, Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, Wells River, St. Johnsbury.

1912

Howes Great London, Brattleboro.

John H. Sparks, Brattleboro.

1914

Robinson's Famous Shows, St. Johnsbury, Newport, Richford, St. Albans, Burlington, Barre, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, Rutland, Bennington.

1915

Jones Bros. World Toured, Bellows Falls, Ludlow, Brandon, Middlebury, Vergennes, Burlington, St. Albans, Montpelier, Bethel.

101 Ranch Wild West, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier.

Frank A. Robbins, Brattleboro.

Sparks, Bennington, Rutland, Burlington, St. Albans, Montpelier, White River Junction.

1924

Hagenbeck-Wallace, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier, St. Albans.

Walter L. Main, Bellows Falls, Franklin, White River Junction, Randolph, Barre, St. Albans, Burlington.

Sells-Floto, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls.

1925

Hagenbeck-Wallace, Brattleboro.

Sparks, Bennington, Rutland, Burlington, Montpelier, St. Albans.

1926

Gentry Bros., Richland, Newport, St. Johnsbury, Windsor.

John Robinson, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington, Rutland.

1927

Downie Bros., Manchester, Hardwick, Ludlow, Morrisville, Springfield, Jeffersonville, White River Junction, Enosburg, Randolph, Richland, Rochester, Troy, Waterbury, Island Pond.

Walter L. Main, Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, Bennington.

1928

Gentry Bros., Newport, Richford, St. Albans, Barre, Randolph, White River Junction.

John Robinson, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

1930

Sparks, Bennington, Rutland, Bellows Falls, White River Junction, Barre, St. Albans.

1931

Sparks, St. Albans, Montpelier, Burlington, Bennington.

1932

Sells-Floto, Brattleboro, Bennington, Burlington, Montpelier, St. Albans.

1940

Hunt Bros., St. Johnsbury, Hardwick, Morrisville, Brattleboro, Randolph, Windsor, Springfield.

1946

King Bros., Hardwick, St. Albans, Vergennes, Brandon, Manchester, Brattleboro.

1951

King Bros., St. Johnsbury, Newport, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington, Middlebury.

1952

King Bros.-Cristiani, Brattleboro, Bennington, Rutland, St. Johnsbury, Montpelier, St. Albans, Burlington.

1955

Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey, Montpelier, Burlington.

W. C. Coup 1881 newspaper ad. Pfening Archives.

1916

Barnum & Bailey, White River Junction, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

Sparks, Bellows Falls, St. Johnsbury.

1917

Jess Willard Wild West, Brattleboro.

1919

Sells-Floto, Bellows Falls, Montpelier, Burlington.

1920

Hagenbeck-Wallace, Montpelier, Burlington, Rutland.

1921

Sparks, Bennington, Rutland, Burlington, St. Albans, Montpelier, White River Junction.

1922

Walter L. Main, Newport, Bellows Falls.

Sources: Stuart Thayer collection, *Burlington Free Press & Times*, Pfening Archives, Circus World Museum, Ringling-Barnum route books, *Rutland Daily Herald & Globe*, Richard E. Conover files.

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CIRCUS**

**CRAFT KITS**

**H0, 0 and 1/2"**

Send stamped, self addressed envelope for list.

State which scale you build in.

**CLASSIC KITS**  
**P. O. Box 0262**  
**Kittrell, NC 27544**

# **CIRCUSIANA FOR SALE**

Scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings,  
ticket stubs, and autographed photos.

Programs

Copies of *Bandwagon*, *White Tops*  
and *Little Circus Wagon*.

Send self addressed stamped envelope for list.

**Dolly Eisch-Hurst**  
**924 Wabank St.**  
**Lancaster, PA 17603**

**A**fter George Sun sold his interest in Sun Bros. Circus to brother Pete in 1912, he retired to Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he found relief in the waters of the springs from an injury incurred while performing years before. On June 14, 1913 Sun and his wife sailed from New York for a grand tour of Europe, issuing a route card listing the route like the good circus man he was.

In the fall of 1915 he again got the itch to re-enter the circus business. Concluding that heavy trucks could successfully move freight from city to city, Sun felt the time had arrived to move a circus completely by trucks, and to that end he created a prospectus to entice investors to back a fully motorized circus for the 1916 season.

While no circus had previously used solely truck transport, a few shows had experimented with motor powered vehicles. The first was in 1909 when Bill Curtis bought a three-wheeled Knox tractor for the Sells-Floto show. In 1913 the Buffalo Bill-Pawnee Bill wild west show used two Studebaker trucks. B. L. "Bernie" Wallace, long identified with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show, announced in the March 7, 1914 *Billboard* that he and several other showmen were incorporating a company to put a fifteen truck circus on the road. Nothing came of this effort until 1921.

Sun began his business plan by comparing the costs of a motorized and a railroad circus. Moving an eight or ten car show on trucks rather than on rail cars would save \$54,010 over a thirty week season. Other projected savings included the cost of feeding one hundred and ten horses, \$7,350; one hundred eight days of livery hire, \$3,600; reduced agents expenses, \$3,000; and lower winter quarters expenses, \$10,000.

With a daily average gross of \$600, and expenses of \$350, the profit would be \$250 a day or \$45,000 on a thirty week tour. It would cost \$40,000 to purchase the equipment. The seventeen vehicles and nine trailers would cost \$30,000, and the other properties, \$10,000. The estimated life of the trucks was 100,000 miles.

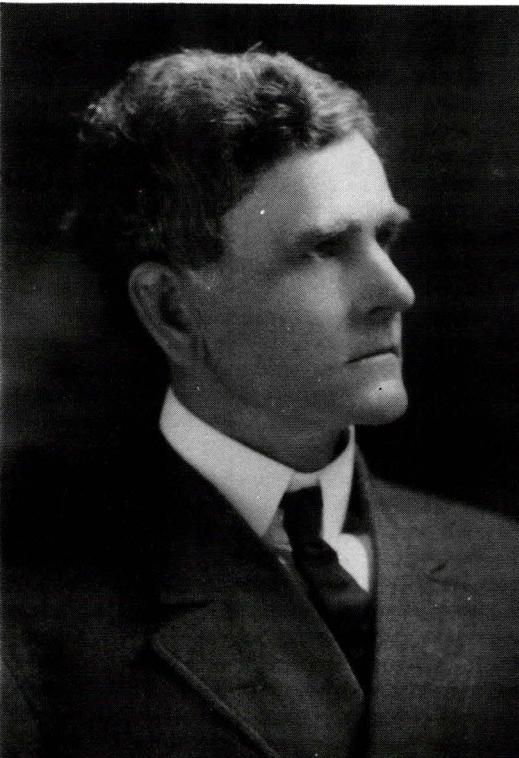
He envisioned making 1,000 show stands in five years, averaging the cost of the trucks at \$30 for each show day. He planned to have eight lengths of reserve seats, holding 500 people, and thirty lengths of blues, holding 1,500 people, making a potential maximum gross of \$1,000 at one performance.

# Planning An Early Completely MOTORIZED CIRCUS

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

Sun would put up \$10,000 of his own money. Additional funding would come from four investors, three of whom he appears to have had lined up, each putting up \$5,000. The remainder of the seed capital was to come in \$5000 shares from an experienced showman and a truck manufacturing firm, the latter being a credit on the cost of equipment. While Sun probably wrote most prominent truck manufacturers such as Studebaker, Mack, Knox, Pierce Arrow, Reliance, Republic, Service and Kelly-Springfield, he received responses from the Four Wheel Drive Auto Company of Clintonville, Wisconsin; the Duplex-Power Car Company of Charlotte, Michigan; and the General Motors Truck Company of Pontiac, Michigan.

George Sun. Circus World Museum collection.



He then sent each of the truck companies a listing of the show equipment required. His prospectus included:

Truck No. 1. Pole wagon, carrying seven forty foot center poles; five twenty-two foot quarters poles on the sides and fifty twelve foot long reserve seat stringers. Twenty-two feet long, total load 6,000 pounds.

Truck No. 2. To carry thirty quarters poles on sides and two hundred and ten blue seat boards on the inside. Total load 6,000 pounds.

Truck No. 3. To carry eighty 16 foot stringers, six extra reserve seat boards and sixty extra blue seat boards. Total load 6,000 pounds.

Truck No. 4. To carry one hundred side poles, two hundred stakes, main guys, toe pins, bail rings and odds and ends. Total load 6,000 pounds.

Truck No. 5. To carry complete big top. Load dry 4,800, wet load 6,500 pounds.

Truck No. 6. Two ton truck for No. 1 advance car.

Truck No. 7. Two ton truck for No. 2 advance car.

Truck No. 8. Two ton truck to carry twenty-four passengers.

Truck No. 9. Two ton truck to carry twenty-four passengers.

Truck No. 10. Two ton truck for office-ticket wagon. To pull two ton candy stand wagon.

Truck No. 11. Two ton truck for light fixtures and gasoline tank. To pull a two ton lion cage.

Truck No. 12 One ton truck for animal cage. To pull one cage trailer.

Truck No. 13. One ton truck for animal cage. To pull one cage trailer.

Truck No. 14. One ton truck for animal cage. To pull one cage trailer.

Truck No. 15. One ton truck for bosses. To have some trouble shooting equipment. These men were to lead the route and mark the turns, and repair and bad places on the route.

Trailer No. 1. Complete cookhouse. Total load 6,000 pounds.

Trailer No. 2 Side show canvas, trunks, stages. Total load 6,000 pounds.

Trailer No. 3 Trunks, boxes and props, Total load 6,000 pounds.

Trailer No. 4. To carry eight sets of jacks and the dressing room canvas. Total load 4,200 pounds.

One roadster for the advance agent.  
One passenger car for the staff.

The canvas was to be a 100 foot round big top with three 40 foot middles and a ten foot sidewall, a twenty

by twenty foot marquee, a seventy foot menagerie-side show tent with two 30 foot middles and a ten by ten foot marquee, a forty by sixty foot dressing room top, and two pit shows.

The seating was to be eight lengths of eight high reserve seats and thirty lengths of eight high blue seats.

There were to be ten cages of animals in the side show. No parade was to be given.

Personal was to include twelve men in the band, twenty-four performers, two ticket sellers, a bookkeeper, an adjuster, seven men on advance, forty working men, ten bosses and twelve chauffeurs.

The \$600 a day gross was to come from: big show tickets, 760 at 50 cents each, \$380; side show tickets, 700 at ten cents each, \$70; reserve seats, 320 at twenty-five cents each, \$80; concert tickets, 200 at ten cents each \$50; and pit shows and candy stands, \$50.

Sun projected the cost of the advance: One agent to contract lot, secure licence, place newspaper ads and buy billboards, \$20 a week plus \$15 hotel allowance. No. 1 bill car manager for city posting and to act as timekeeper and pay master, \$10, hotel allowance \$10. No. 2 bill car manager for country routes, same salary and hotel allowance. One lithographer and programer, \$7, hotel allowance \$10. Three bill posters, \$7 each, hotel allowance \$10 each. Gasoline, oil and flour for paste, \$27 a week. Printing of advertising, \$250 a week. Total cost of advance, \$420 per week.

Weekly payroll on the show was projected as: twelve bandsmen, \$125; twenty-four performers, \$425; manager, assistant manager, adjuster and two ticket sellers, \$160; seven department bosses, \$100; twelve chauffeurs (drivers), \$110; and forty working men, \$120.

The daily expense was projected as: salaries per day, \$175; complete advance, \$70; lot and license, \$30; billboards and newspapers, \$25; gasoline and oil, \$15; and cookhouse food, \$35, making the total daily nut \$350.

The \$40,000 to frame the show was broken down as follows: all canvas, ropes and flags, \$2,400; eight lengths of reserve seats and thirty lengths of blues, \$525; lighting equipment, \$700; cookhouse layout, \$300; band coats, caps and bass drum, \$125; tickets and contracts, \$100; typewriter and three cash registers, \$150; animals for cages, \$1,200; expense for traveling, booking, hotels, \$500; seventeen motor trucks, \$28,000; eight trailers, \$3,000; twenty-four bodies to be built for trucks and trailers, \$3,000.

Sun's prospectus letter to the three motor truck companies prompted a response from each. The assistant sales manager of

the Four Wheel Drive Auto Co. of Clintonville, Wisconsin, wrote on December 22, 1915: "Because of the fact that the nature of the equipment is unsettled, we can do no more, Mr. Sun, than to give you approximate prices which we would offer on our standard chassis in 3 and ton-and-a-half models.

"As you know from our specification book, our 3 ton truck sells for \$4,000 list; our ton-and-a-half to 2 ton sells for \$3,600. In a general way we would expect to offer you a price representing our dealer's discount of 20% off from list, and we had contemplated, in order to assure your success in this matter, to offer you a little additional in the way of extra parts, etc. for your consumption as it became necessary. This would permit your carrying in your outfit certain supply of parts constantly at your hand, and having a supply of same at some central point subject to your call.

"Our idea in this is because you are moving constantly and there is no central service station to whom you would be in position always to look for service.

"As to trailers, we would put you in touch with our very good friends, the Troy Trailer Company, of Troy, Ohio, with full instruction to give you the very best equipment and the very best price irrespective of our presence in the deal. In other words, we do not want to make any money off your trailer equipment."

Sun received a letter dated January 10, 1916 from the president of the Duplex-Power Car Co. of Charlotte, Michigan: "We have just received your very interesting letter and assure you it would give us great pleasure in furnishing trucks for the purpose that you mentioned as we believe it would be a great good advertising proposition for us and we can assure you that we will heartily assist in any way possible in allowing you to use the Duplex Four Wheel Drive trucks. We have a truck that is now recognized throughout the country for commercial as well as military purposes by the United States government as being the most efficient truck for that purpose that is now made.

"We manufacturer these trucks only in

two and three ton capacity. No doubt the one-ton truck you mention could be changed to a two-ton and use these two sizes only.

The Troy trailer has been recognized as the most efficiency (sic) trailer at the present time although there are other trailers which no doubt are equally efficient. It would not do to use a regular lumber wagon behind these wagons as the speed of the trucks would be too high for these wagons without proper springs and adjustments and no doubt would soon pull them to pieces.

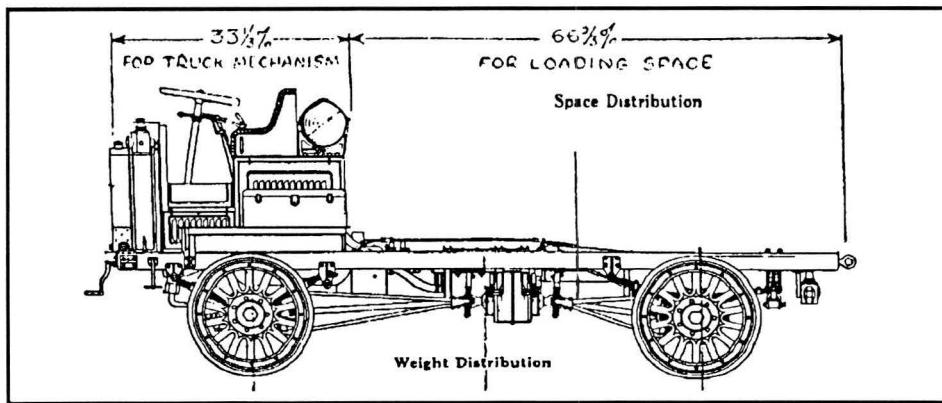
"Your proposition as to the making of these bodies upon a 10% profit above the cost we would accept and we could turn them out very quickly under your supervision. As several of these trucks would have to be made special, we would ask that you arrange as soon as possible to place your order as a little later it is going to be very hard to run out special equipment but we can assure you that a fleet of Duplex Four-Wheel Drive trucks would render you such excellent service that you would be proud of running them from place to place as you would not have to have nearly as many of these as you would other makes.

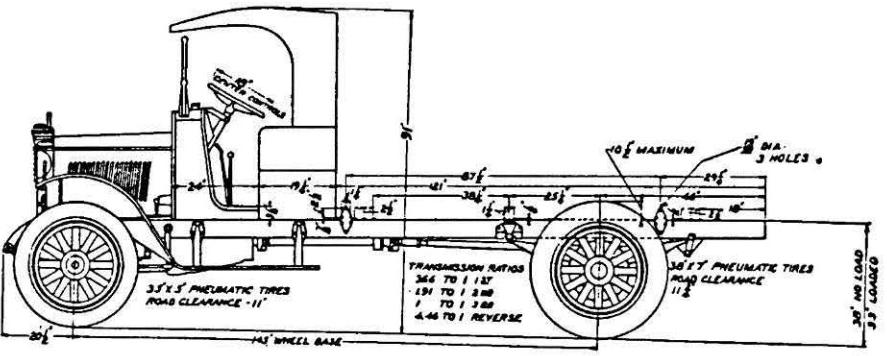
"We believe the proposition made you as to discount, etc. will be perfectly satisfactory as it is the most liberal proposition we have ever made for outfits along this line, but believing as we do that it will be a great benefit to us as well as service to you, we will await your immediate reply."

Sun wrote to Four Wheel Drive in early March: "Your letter of February 26 received and carefully read. It is just as you say best make haste slowly in this case. I thought I had everything figured out where I could go to buy trucks, and other equipment, and let the band play.

"I am determined to promote this motor truck circus, and have found I must make the right truck purchase, and be

Four Wheel Drive Auto Company chassis. Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library.





sure to get what is best for this transportation.

"As you say our success all depends on your truck, we must have service, on account of playing the smaller towns and going through the country, where you have no service stations.

"You offering to place a mechanic, during our first summer out of about 26 weeks that understands your trucks, to make adjustments and repairs, as it becomes necessary, and to show our chauffeurs just how to handle these trucks, and advise the men best speed to go. We to pay his salary and board, this is encouraging and guarantees us service, for the first summer, and is very satisfactory. The furnishing of the extra parts is also liberal. And your guarantee of the first 5,000 miles on your trucks, proves to us you will stand behind your trucks.

"The body building privilege on a 10% basis is also all right.

"We will agree to arrange the advertising program to your entire satisfaction, and hope to give you value received.

"Up to this point we agree and understand each other.

"You want to recommend all three ton trucks. It would not work out right. For instance we will have a number of animal cages and animal cage trailers, for the small animals, one and two animals to each cage, will weigh around two hundred pounds to a load. Any small two wheel drive truck of three quarter or one ton size would be ample and cost less than one thousand dollars each, and will trail regular cage wagons, figuring on going only 8 to 10 miles the hour.

"Now our miscellaneous loads will only require a one and a half or two ton truck. For instance the advance bill cars, each will carry 3 men and one ton of printing matter, at one loading every day they are lighter until empty, reload every 10 or 12 days, now they don't want a three ton truck, or do we want to spend 3,200 dollars for advance cars.

"Again we have one ticket wagon truck, light electrical equipment load, these two

The Duplex-Power Car Company chassis. Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library.

trucks to pull each a trailer, one candy layout and the other a lion den, these loads are all around one and a half tons or less. We can't put two of these loads on one truck, they must be separate. Each load by itself, as you can see by the class of those mentioned. So you can see a three ton truck is unnecessary for these loads."

The Four Wheel Drive firm wrote again on March 17, 1916: "We want to make clear to you first, Mr. Sun, that our price covered ten trucks, five 3 tons, new, one ton-and-a-half, and four 3 ton, rebuilt and sold under our regular new car guarantee.

"We take it from your letter that our prices are unsatisfactory, and that what you want is an equipment of trucks sold at absolute manufacturer's cost with a certain advertising consideration added.

"We have no doubt that your circus would be an eminent success transported in the way you have in mind and we know that the F. W. D., as we have laid it out, would do the work dependably. When this equipment is finished and in your hands, and we have carried out our part of your contract entirely, there will be no appreciable profit in the business. In fact, it will rather represent a substantial loss as the same trucks we are offering you can be readily sold by this company at a substantial profit in other quarters. The advertising feature and the investigation of a new line of operation for a truck are the considerations which have interested us in your proposition from the beginning.

"Regretting that we are unable to get together on this equipment, but nevertheless assuring you of our appreciation of your interest."

Sun had also been corresponding with the General Motors Truck Company in Pontiac, Michigan. T. L. Doyle of the GMC sales department wrote Sun on

March 15, 1916: "Your valued favor of February 21 is received and we have noted with much interest all the advertising advantages you mentioned as sure to accrue to the motor truck manufacturer with whose product your show is equipped. While it is true that such advertising would have a certain value, our many years experience in this business has shown that the actual selling value of such advertising schemes is very much over-rated.

"When we first started in this business years ago we felt that it would be fine advertising to get GMC trucks used by this man or that man and in a large number of cases we made price concessions with that object in view. It cost us many thousands of dollars and we wish to state that all of this so-called advertising never resulted in one single sale of a GMC truck. In fact, in most cases it acted as a boomerang, because the man that got the first concession felt that he was entitled to it again on all his future purchases, and knowing that he received it once, he fought that much harder for it on his second purchase. His neighbors soon came to know in one way or another that he had received a concession on his truck and they naturally felt that their business had just as much advertising possibilities in it and held out for similar concessions.

"As before stated, all this cost us many thousands of dollars and resulted in our executive committee laying down an iron-clad ruling to the effect that we must not make concessions of any kind or nature to anyone for the expected advertising value of having GMC trucks in certain lines of work.

"As to your suggestion of our guaranteeing GMC trucks in your service for 5,000 miles, would say that the only guarantee we are authorized to issue on GMC trucks is that which is printed on the inside of the front cover of the enclosed pamphlet describing our heavy duty trucks.

"We would certainly like to do business with you and will be very glad to sell you GMC trucks on the same basis as we sell them to everyone else—that is solely on the merits of their construction, with a reasonable discount in proportion to the number of trucks bought at one time, and under our regular 90 day guarantee. As the quality of the trucks you use should be a far greater consideration for you than the matter of price or concession on account of advertising value, we would suggest that you give that phase of the matter your best thought and come here to our factory and satisfy yourself from your own observations that the highest quality procurable and the lowest reasonable price consistent therewith are the two most prominent characteristics of GMC

motor trucks. We could then discuss the other angles of this deal, and to much better mutual advantage and understanding than would be possible through volumes of correspondence.

"We would very much appreciate your advising of when we can expect such a visit from you in the near future."

While surviving correspondence between the Duplex-Power Car Company and Sun indicated that the firm agreed to his demands regarding the advertising discount, the show nevertheless never got off the ground. The reasons for this failure are unknown, although it would appear Sun underestimated the cost of the trucks and therefore the amount of money needed to frame the show.

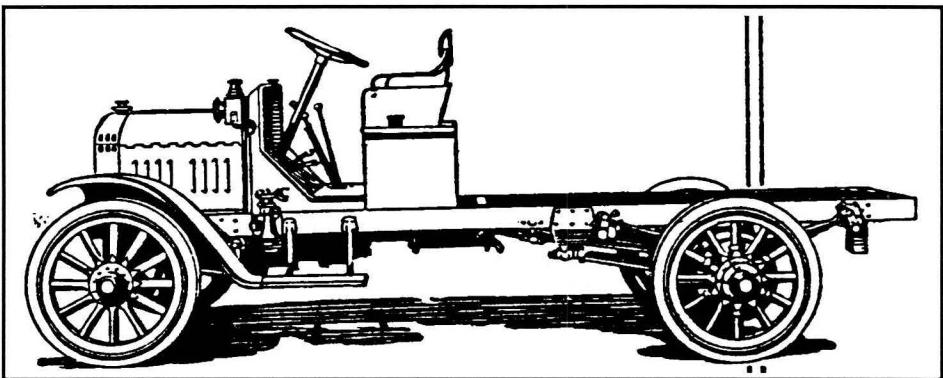
Ironically circuses began greater use of trucks in 1916. The Al G. Barnes show used two Republic trucks, one as a cage and one for an air calliope. That same year the Mighty Haag Circus became the first wagon show to utilize trucks when it used two or three Reliance trucks, one carrying the bandwagon. The rest of the show was pulled overland by mules.

The first real step toward motorizing circuses came in 1917 when Richard Ringling, son of Alf. T., framed the R. T. Richards circus using a number of Reliance trucks. However the show also used a number of rail show cages and wagons, some pulled by the trucks. Additional trucks were added in mid-season.

The Newtons, father Lucky Bill and son Honest Bill, moved their 1917 shows completely on Kelly-Springfield trucks.

In 1918 the Coop & Lent circus was converted to motorized transportation from rails using trucks from the Service Motor Company of Wabash, Indiana. The show was owned by I. S. "Trader" Horn of Kansas City and R. M. Harvey. Harvey was successful where Sun had been not in that he promoted the trucks from Service.

In a February 6, 1958 letter Harvey stated: "Service agreed to provide as many



The General Motors Company chassis.  
Automotive History Collection, Detroit  
Public Library.

trucks as were required to haul the show. It was carefully weighed and measured and their engineers worked out the computation of power needed. The president of Service traveled with us at the start. Our troubles started immediately in that we were unable to move the show. There was a shortage of power. The president of Service phoned Wabash and told them of our problems. He instructed them to give us more trucks. . . . However the government restricted them from doing any more commercial work and to use all their capacity for Army orders. Thus we were left without power. We were behind our billing, with no chance to catch up as every day trucks had to be sent back to bring property that had been left behind. The show closed after several weeks."

Frank P. Spellman began framing the United States Motorized Circus in 1917 and finally opened it in 1919. The show moved completely on Kelly-Springfield trucks. It closed after three days. B. L. Wallace framed a new motorized circus in 1921.

A Reliance truck on Mighty Haag in 1916. Pfening Archives.



A few other small shows began using some trucks in the early 1920s; however, it was not until 1926 that Andrew Downie framed a large motorized circus, Downie Bros. This circus continued under his and later Charles Sparks' ownership until 1938.

George Sun had the vision to see the future; he just didn't have the right timing. He died on June 15, 1917 after taking his own life.

Most of the material for this article came from the George Sun file at the Circus World Museum. Other information came from Richard Reynolds and John Polacsek.

## BIG TOP MANIA

By Paul Horsman

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and illustrations.

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**T**he winter of 1893-94 in Topeka was difficult for Allen Sells as his health slowly deteriorated. In January 1894, Allen and his wife Sarah Ann went to Excelsior Springs, Missouri, in the futile hope that the waters would be of benefit. For the remainder of his life Allen was generally confined to his apartment in the Chesterfield Hotel which he had built in 1888.

The last of the Sells brothers to see Allen alive was Ephraim who visited Allen on March 1. Lewis and Peter ignored the illness of their brother because of the bitterness arising from their feud with Willie over Willie's misuse of the Sells name.

The March 21 Topeka State Journal reported the death of Allen: "DEATH OF COL. SELLS. Honored Citizen Passes Away at 8:45 Last Evening. His End Was Not Unexpected. His Life Sapped by Pneumonia. Col. Sells Leaves a Fortune of \$300,000.

"At his home in the Chesterfield Hotel William Allen Sells died last night at 8:45. The end was not unexpected as his health has been poor all winter, and his condition during the past week has been such as to convince his relatives and friends that the end was a matter of only a short time.

"Mr. Sells suffered a relapse last Friday night and all day yesterday he had been sinking. Mrs. Sells and Mr. and Mrs. William Sells Jr. were at his bedside when he passed away and he died in his son's arms. The end was peaceful and came without a struggle.

"A complication of Bright's disease and pneumonia was the cause of Mr. Sells' death. It is said that the exposure and hardships of the circus life which he followed for more than a dozen years were responsible for the failure of his health. Dr. Mulvane, who has been his family physician for years, attended Mr. Sells up to a week before his death. He gave them no hope of recovery and Dr. Menninger and Dr. Righter were called into consultation, but they pronounced Mr. Sells past all medical aid.

"Mr. Sells was less than 58 years of age, having been born September 24, 1836, at Cleveland, Ohio. He was the second of eleven children, three brothers and seven sisters. In 1868 Mr. Sells became convinced that fortunes were to be made in the circus business. He induced his brothers Ephraim, Peter and Lewis, to embark in the enterprise, which resulted in the celebrated Sells Brothers' circus, a branch of which is still in existence. He was the most active worker of the four brothers in the success of the enterprise, and the result

# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING Exalted in Aim and Pure in Tone

Vol. IV, Chapter Three, Part Two, 1894  
By Orin Copple King

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was that after twelve years, he had acquired an independent fortune.

"In 1881 Col. Sells moved to Topeka. He purchased the old Teft House and transferred (sic) it into the Windsor Hotel (now the National). Mr. Sells then retired to his farm north of the city and lived there for two years. In 1888 he built the Chesterfield Hotel which has since been his home. Col. Sells has built several other handsome blocks in the city and has been a public spirited and progressive citizen.

"Col. Sells leaves but one child, William, or 'Willie' as he is commonly called here in Topeka where he has grown up. He was devoted to his wife, son and little grandson and his home life was remarkable for its simplicity and happiness. He never allowed the great cares of his business to enter there. As a business man

William Allen Sells as pictured in the New York Clipper following his death. Pfening Archives.



Col. Sells was a hard worker and a 'listener' as the large fortune he has accumulated bears testimony, but no one ever cast a suspicion of unfairness on his business transactions.

"Mr. Sells was appointed chairman of the board of police commissioners last spring by Governor Lewelling but with that exception he never held nor sought office. Mr. Sells was a member of no church although he had been brought up in the Presbyterian faith at Columbus, Ohio. The only organization of which he was a member was the St. Ananias

club. It is probable that the pall-bearers will be chosen from his old friends in this organization.

"His son, William Sells Jr., to whom the larger part of the fortune will fall, has followed in his father's footsteps by adopting the circus profession.

"The time of the funeral has not been set. It will be deferred until the relatives at Columbus arrive in the city. Each of Mr. Sells' brothers will attend, and also several sisters. His sisters are: Mrs. E. E. West of Kansas City, Kans.; Mrs. Willis Cobb, of Columbus; Mrs. J. M. Holt, Mrs. B. F. Greene, Mrs. Barrett and Mrs. Colby, all of Columbus. Col. Sells' mother, now 81 years of age, still lives at Columbus, but will be unable to make the journey to Topeka."

Obituaries are obligated, it seems, to inflate whatever good can be found in the deceased. Did anyone ever cast a suspicion of unfairness on Allen's business transactions? Ask Charles Andress, Prof. Norris, Allen's own brothers and countless unpaid working men.

The Journal carried the following regarding the funeral on Good Friday, March 23: "The parlors of the Chesterfield Hotel were inadequate to accommodate the friends of the late William Allen Sells, whose funeral was held at 2 o'clock this afternoon. A large portion of the friends did not gain access to the room except to take a last look at the remains after the service.

"Rev. Dr. Alderson, the pastor of the First Presbyterian church, officiated in the place of Rev. Dr. McCabe whose illness prevented his attendance. Dr. Alderson spoke briefly of the many excellent traits of the dead showman, and prayed for divine comfort for the members of the bereaved family. The service, while brief, was impressive in the extreme. A quartette choir composed of Mrs. A. Lingafelt, Miss Lescher, Frank Crane and Harry Overholt sang 'Nearer My God to Thee,' and 'In the Sweet Bye and Bye.' The latter song had been Col. Sells' lifelong favorite.

"The pallbearers were A. S. Johnson, P. I. Bonebrake, John R. Mulvane, A. Bergen, John Guthrie, Jacob Smith, H. K. Rowley and Guilford Dudley.

"The calm and almost life-like features of Mr. Sells reposed in a black cloth-covered casket, with heavy silver handles. The heavy copper lining of the casket was concealed from view by flowers. The plate bore simply the name 'William Allen Sells' with a sheaf of wheat engraved on one side. A minature (sic) sheaf was also placed on the top of the casket. This was in keeping with Col. Sells' agricultural taste. It is said that he considered the growing of wheat the 'prettiest sight on earth.'

"Among the floral offerings which occupied conspicuous places in the room were: A large floral harp from the St. Ananias club; a wreath from Dr. Mulvane; cut flowers from Mr. and Mrs. Ashton; lilies from Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Manspeaker; cut flowers from Mr. and Mrs. W. H. West (of Primrose & West); a bunch of carnations from Bessie Gibson; a beautiful floral pillow of lilies and many colored roses from Mrs. Sells with the word 'husband' in the center; a sickle and sheaf, and several bunches of Easter lilies, from 'Willie' Sells; a star from little Allen Sells (big grandson), with his picture in the center, and 'My-dad' underneath. There was also a bunch of cut flowers from the hotel employees.

"Only Ephraim Sells of Colonel Sells' brothers has arrived in the city. He is accompanied by Colonel John Murray of Columbus, Ohio. Three of his sisters were in attendance at the funeral. They are Mrs. Ed West of Kansas City, Mrs. S. H. Barrett and Mrs. Mary Greene, both of Columbus.

"Thirty employes of Lemmon (sic) Brothers' circus came up from Kansas City this afternoon, and attended the funeral in a body.

"The hearse containing the body of Mr. Sells was followed to the grave in the Topeka cemetery by a large concourse of friends in carriages. With the exception of a short prayer by Dr. Alderson there was no service at the grave. The body was put into a grave vault, one in which the sides of the grave are walled with brick on a foundation of cement, and the space between the walls and the earth is filled in with cement. Over this an immense stone is placed, after which the grave was refilled, making a final resting place free for



The performing personnel of the Great Syndicate Shows in Ukiah, California on September 8, 1894. Pfening Archives.

all time from the actions and changes of the elements."

The day following the funeral the *Journal* ran a story concerning a special mourner in the procession: "One of the most conspicuous features of the funeral procession of the late Allen Sells yesterday afternoon, was a colored man on horse-back following closely behind the hacks. The oddity of this figure created a great deal of comment on what was otherwise a sad and impressive parade.

The colored man rode a white freckled horse that appeared to be a stranger to oats and not on speaking terms with hay. The man wore a calico coat trimmed with pieces of red cloth in two rows down the back. He rode with the haughty air of a knight and the dignity of a drum-major.

This man is undoubtedly unbalanced mentally, but he was none the less one of the greatest admirers Col. Sells ever had. His devotion to Mr. Sells knew no bounds. The friendship began several years ago when Mr. Sells went on his bail bond, when he was charged with assault with intent to kill, and it was he who brought his acquittal. This service the colored man never forgot and probably never will."

Subsequent stories in the Topeka papers revealed the widely known "secret" that Willie was adopted. Many close to the family were aware of the adoption, but to the general public the adoption was a great surprise. Everyone expected Willie to be the principal heir of Allen.

On March 31 Allen's will was opened: "THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF WILLIAM ALLEN SELLS. IN THE NAME OF GOD: AMEN.

"I, William Allen Sells, being of lawful age and of sound mind and memory, do make, publish, and declare the following to be my Last Will and Testament, thereby revoking all former wills by me made.

"1st. It is my will that all of my just debts and funeral expenses be paid by my Executrix hereinafter named.

"2nd. I hereby will and bequeath to my wife Sarah Ann Sells, all of the property, both real and personal, that I may possess at the time of my death.

"3rd. I hereby constitute and appoint my said wife, Sara Ann Sells, sole Executrix of this my last Will and Testament, without bond.

"IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name, at the city of Topeka, Shawnee County, State of Kansas, this 28th day of August 1889. Sig. William Allen Sells "STATE OF KANSAS Shawnee County. ss.

The undersigned were present and saw William Allen Sells sign his name to the above and foregoing instrument, which he informed us was his Last Will and Testament; that we have signed our names to the same as witnesses thereto at his request, in this presence and in the presence of each other.

"Done at the Chesterfield Hotel, in the city of Topeka, county of Shawnee, and state of Kansas, the day and year last above written. Sig. Nellie Ligatis, W. A. Gebhardt"

Following the reading of the will, Judge Elliott approached Sara Ann to swear her in as executrix.

"Mrs. Sells arose," according to the Topeka *Daily Capital*, "but the judge had only said a few words when she was seen to stagger forward. Judge Bergen, her attorney, was nearest to her and rushed to her assistance. She fell to the floor, but Judge Bergen was in time to break the force of the fall, and no injury resulted. Dr. Pelton happened to be in the court room and at once applied restoratives, and in a few moments she recovered consciousness. Dr. Pelton said it was simply a fainting spell and no serious consequences were likely to result. Mrs. Sells was taken home in a hack, and last evening was reported better."

There was much speculation as to the value of Allen's estate, but it was expected to exceed \$250,000. Sarah Ann Sells became the richest woman in Kansas.

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At the end of the season of 1893, Sells & Rentfrow's Enormous Railroad Shows came to rest on the fair grounds at Topeka, despite reports of other locations.

"The case of Sells & Rentfrow, against Lewis Peter and Ephraim Sells for damages in the sum of \$48,000 has been compromised out of court," according to the March 10 *Journal*.

"The case was brought by Sells & Rentfrow filing a suit a year ago in the circuit court of Shawnee County for \$48,000 damages from Lewis, Peter and Ephraim Sells for damages done during the season of 1890 beginning July 1st and continuing 56 days. They allege that the Sells brothers who were also in the circus business conspired to ruin them financially by advertising that the Sells & Rentfrow show would not appear when it was billed to appear; that it had stranded on the road. The petition alleged too that letters were written to the city officers of the places selected by them at which to perform notifying them that the Sells & Rentfrow show was merely a cover for thieves, swindlers and confidence men, and not a safe set to allow in town, as they would plunder the citizens. They asked for damages at the rate of \$500 a day or \$28,000, and \$20,000 additional.

"In a counter suit the Sells brothers denied all the allegations set forth and asserted that Willie Sells and Mr. Rentfrow's circus was worth less than \$6,000 and used the Sells name to profit from the wide reputation of the Sells brothers' circus, but to the great detriment of the latter."

In settlement Willie and Allen Sells signed an agreement never to go into the circus business again using the Sells name, and the Sells brothers paid Willie and Rentfrow damages of \$4,000, with the court costs being paid by both sides proportionately.

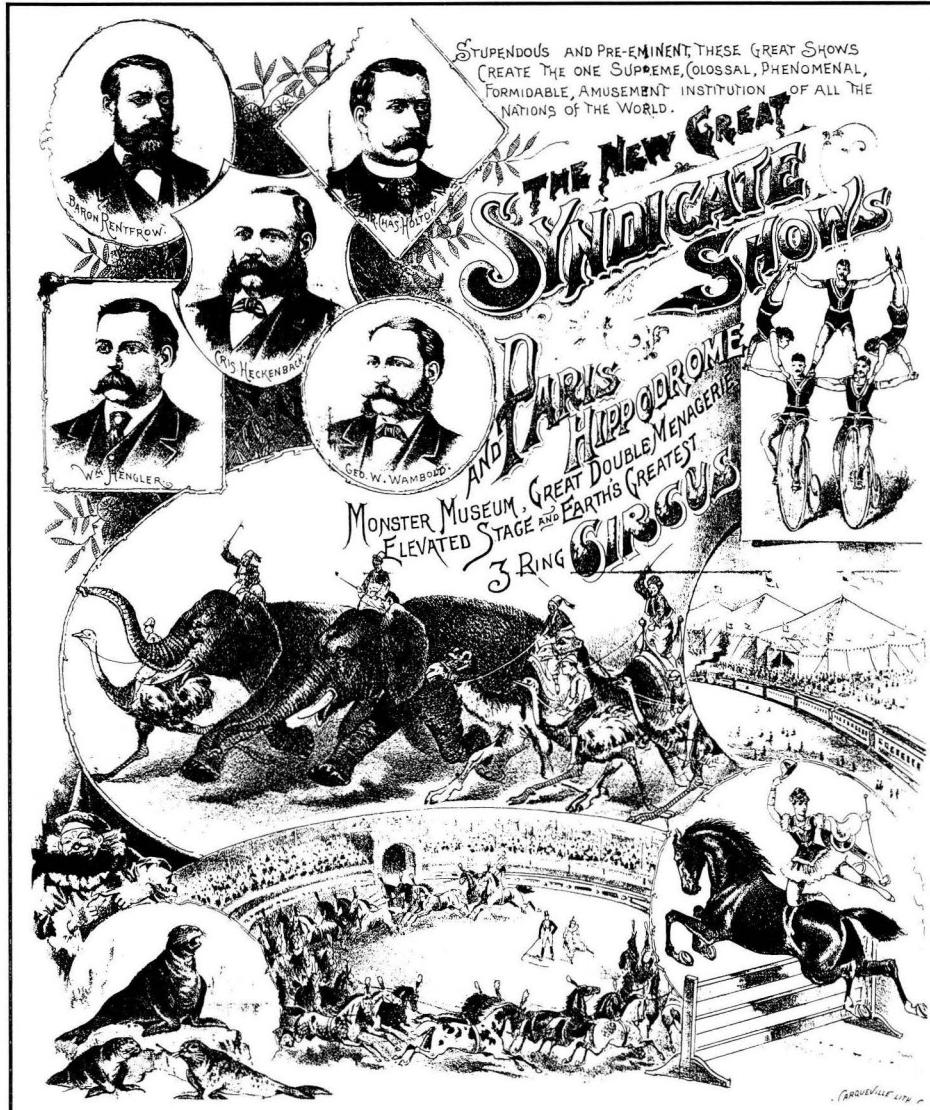
During the winter Willie kept a half dozen ostriches in the basement of the Chesterfield Hotel. Sam Radges, publisher of the city directory, dropped his guard while admiring the birds and one of them bit the diamond stud off Radges shirt front and swallowed it.

"His first idea was to have the ostrich arrested for highway robbery, but he has since decided to await developments."

There are no reports of the recovery of the diamond. The tale was probably an invention of Willie's press department.

An advertisement in the April 15 Topeka *Daily Capital* announced a new title for Willie's show:

"The Mighty Monarch  
of all Tented Exhibitions.  
Coming in all Its Entirety!  
The New Great  
SYNDICATE SHOWS



Great Syndicate Shows letterhead. The illustration covered the complete front of the 9 1/4 x 11 3/4" sheet, with the message written on the back. Circus World Museum collection.

and Paris Hippodrome,  
Consolidated with  
SELLS & RENTFROW'S

Enormous Railroad Shows, Triple Circus  
Royal Hippodrome, Great Elevated Stages.  
Five-Continent Menagerie Spectacular  
Pageant and Grand Aggregation of New  
Sensational Features.

ONE DAY ONLY--TWO PER-  
FORMANCES.

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Exalted in Aim and Pure in Tone.

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100--Sensational and Startling Acts--100.  
The Best Performing Elephants, Sea lions,  
leopards and Baby Camels, 40 Great Cir-

cus Acts. 4 Great Bands in Street Parade, Courtly Knights and Dames, a Drove of Monster Camels, Zebras, Bears and Baby Monkeys, 20 Great leapers, Richly Carved and Gilded Tableau Wagons, Myriad Cages, Dens and lairs. And the only flock of Giant African Ostriches, the largest birds on earth. The only show possessing such a feature. See Wm. Sells, the world's greatest rider! See 100 other startling and sensational foreign features. Two Menageries of Wild Beasts. And open dens of Savage Brutes, Mammoth Elephants, Lions, Tigers, Hyenas, Bears, Wolves, Leopards and Panthers, Zebras trained to drive like horses. Knights in Armor, ladies as Princesses, Male and Female Jockeys, Squadrons of Princes, Nobles and Cavaliers in Royal Robes and Rich Costumes, Mounted on spirited Horses like days of old.

"Be Sure and Ask Your Station Agent for  
CHEAP EXCURSION RATES.  
Every Railroad Gives low Excursion Rates

to this big show. AT 10 A. M. A GLORIOUS GRAND HOLIDAY FREE STREET PARADE!"

The big news appeared at the bottom of the ad: "Friday evening, April 27, at 7 o'clock sharp a grand illuminated, dazzling, glittering street parade will take place, first time in the history of Topeka. An After Dark Circus Parade. Grand display of fireworks and calcium effects; a solid mile of gold and glitter under the brilliant rays of the electric lights, presenting a sight to be seen only once in a life time.

"Friday evening, April 27, is the date; don't miss it, immediately after which the doors of the big show will open for our Inaugural Exhibition.

"Two performances Saturday, afternoon and night, April 28."

All proceeds of the Friday show were pledged to the Topeka Elks lodge.

The after-dark parade drew an immense crowd to Kansas Avenue and to the lot. Location of the lot can not be stated unequivocally for some ads and handouts reported the site as Eleventh Street and Kansas Avenue and others reported Fourteenth and Harrison Streets.

The doors did not open until nine o'clock and the performance did not begin until 9:30.

"The performance taken as a whole, was very creditable," according to the *Capital*, "considering the fact that it was the first one given this year. Messrs. Sells & Rentfrow have engaged a fine lot of artists in the various lines and now that things have been limbered up for a genuine performance a first class exhibition will be given at every performance and there will be no hitches.

"The seats were quite well filled last night with an audience that was satisfied with the performance. The family of tumblers and the lithe girl rider were especially fine. The performance ended with both thrilling and ludicrous races.

"Another street parade will be given this morning and a performance given this afternoon and one tonight."

The advertised fireworks were described as meager.

Chief of Police Lindsey claimed that, "Topeka is just now being overrun with tough characters who came here, they say, to go out with the the Sells & Rentfrow circus. The circus has a full force of men employed and these toughs are lying around the outskirts of the city waiting for an opportunity to rob and plunder."

The Chief further stated that, "these men are all strangers and are a tougher lot than the Topeka police are accustomed to dealing with." He advised all show goers to securely lock doors and windows.



John D'Alma ringmaster and press agent of the Great Syndicate Shows in 1894. Stuart Sears collection.

Topeka contributed two colorful characters to the circus. The *Journal* reported that, "'Crook' Wright, who was recently divorced from the notorious Fannie Wright, joined Sells & Rentfrow's circus and now he has gone. He and three other men of color, carry a little girl around the ring in the grand entree on a palanquin.

"Oaskum,' the African prince, who has been in the city the past two months, also joined the circus. He performs in the side show. He was dressed in his native costume, which consists of breech clout and lots of feathers. He exhibits several African weapons, and sings a 'war song.'

During the winter two Topeka merchants had extended credit to Sells & Rentfrow. Before the show left town E. F. Grote, a grocer, and H. G. Beade, a butcher, received partial payment from "Jap" Rentfrow. Both men claimed to have been paid partially with counterfeit bills and they went to Emporia to collect their accounts in real money. Beade received a genuine \$10 bill from Rentfrow to replace the counterfeit. Rentfrow also paid Beade's travel expenses.

The first road date was Osage City, April 30. *The Free Press* carried one advertisement and one handout. The only comment after circus day was, "The usual following of gamblers and toughs were said to be in attendance. We have heard but little comment on the quality of the show and suppose those who attended 'only to see the animals' were well pleased."

En route to the exhibitions at Emporia, May 1, one of the over-loaded flat cars broke down near Reading.

The Emporia *Gazette* was impressed by

"the surpassing performances of the little daughters of Mr. John D'Alma, who are real infant prodigies and also of his older daughter and son for their fine acrobatic work. The D'Alma family have a worldwide reputation."

As with all the shows of Willie Sells, gambling was rampant on the Great Syndicate. The Emporia *Lyon County Democrat* related that, "A young Madison editor who attended the Circus Tuesday lost \$30 on a nice little game known as the 'shell game.' By the aid of the police he recovered \$15."

One handout was used in nearly every Kansas town in 1894, appearing under the heading of, "The Old Reliable Sells & Rentfrow's Shows.

"Many of our older readers will recall the name of the above well-known establishment, that exhibits in our city May 1 with pleasure. With many it brings vividly to memory the first elephant they ever saw. There is a whole sermon in the career of this show. It proves that when any concern becomes known as an honestly conducted one, and fulfills its promises to the public, that it succeeds, and the business flourishes and becomes a fixture, to be handed down from generation to generation. It proves also the truth of the old proverb that 'Honesty is the best policy.' The career of Sells & Rentfrow's show from 1880 to the present time has been one of continuous success. And the proprietors deserve it. In these days of humbug it is really refreshing to be able to speak in terms of praise of an amusement enterprise. This year the managers promise us a new surprise, in the shape of the largest elephant on earth. The largest creature that breathes the breath of life. This will be indeed a great curiosity. The whole show is said to be exceptionally good, and we will miss our guess if their tents are not packed on the day of exhibition. As this will be the only big show to visit this section this year, we advise all our readers to be sure and see it."

What show was the press agent talking about?

Concerning the exhibitions at Florence on May 2, the *Bulletin* had much to say about Sells & Rentfrow and little of it was complimentary.

"Bummy' Very 'Bummy'

"Summing it all up the Sells & Rentfrow's circus is about the biggest robbing machine in the country. It is nothing more or less than a traveling nest of swindlers and robbers. Every ticket agent, collector and fakir is a professional thief who should be in jail. The managers or talkers are monumental liars. The clowns are 'bummier' and more vulgar than the average. The side show and concert are model 'fakes' and ridiculous affairs and the big

show, while on a larger scale, double discounts both. The venders are insultingly 'gally' and troubled with a light fingered tendency. The performance is very mediocre and the animals seem ashamed of their surroundings. The liberality in the 'hippodrome' races is astounding and goes on record with that of the man who gave this boy a nickel to go supperless to bed, got up in the night stole it and then made the boy go without breakfast for losing it. The parade is fair, especially when it is the first one to take place in town. It is probably the intention of this circus to travel on its reputation and the work of the expert thieves it has on its pay roll, but the game will soon wear out. This country is too full of officers of the law and jails for anything like that. Laws and this outfit conflict. A good circus composed of honest men is worthy of the patronage of any class of people and generally gets it, but an affair such as this one should be given the go-by and not be allowed to pitch a tent this side of the place now full of beings of their stripe."

"The calliope with the circus," in the opinion of the *Bulletin*, "makes a good appearance but its voice gives evidence of the need of cough medicine."

Advertisements always mentioned that Willie Sells "will ride at every performance," but the *Bulletin* stated that, "Willie Sells is not riding in the performance of the circus. Willie has a good reputation and don't intend to expose it."

In another column, the *Bulletin* spoke some indisputable truths. "It's a pretty mean man who won't take his child to the circus, and it's a meaner child who isn't better for the going. The circus is with us to stay and the waning of its glory will only commence with the death of birth and the obliteration of history."

"Sells & Rentfrow exhibited in Florence to good crowds Wednesday and special mention is unnecessary. It was the same old story of excitement, joy and tired bodies. Its presence is but a memory to be re-

vived yearly by the absence of the jingle of several hundred dollars, the possession of a few photos of famous freaks and the joy that it only comes once a year."

A brief description of the performances of May 4, was published by the Hutchinson *Clipper*: "The rain yesterday morning seemed to have started for all day, but in spite of the rain the tents were pitched and the parade nearly on time. But the parade was no indication of the show, as part of it had to return to the show grounds on account of the sudden shower.

"The performance in the afternoon was a creditable one to the management and the tent was crowded to witness it. Among the many good features that Mr. D'Alma, the ring master, presented some of those which deserve special mention were:

"The running globe act by Miss Myrtle D'Alma, the Livingston family in their posturing feat was wonderful in the extreme. Miss Murray on her trained charger 'Clark' was loudly applauded as was the slack rope performance by Misses Livingston, Stickney and D'Alma. The performing elephant 'Jess' with his master John Dunn, went through with many maneuvers that seemed impossible for an elephant to perform.

"In the evening on account of an approaching storm, the performance was started promptly on time and to a very small audience. The management being fearful that some accident might occur from the wind, the program was cut very short and was not an indication of the true strength of the show. The boys race with a concert ticket for a prize was won by master Pation. The sack race for the same kind of a reward caused more laughter than any other part of the program.

"Mr. John D'Alma, the press agent of

The Sells Bros. Enormous United Shows on a lot c. 1894. Pfening Archives.

the company made a very pleasant call and when visiting the show took special pains to show us around."

The last Kansas date of the season was Great Bend on May 5.

"One of the most noticeable features of the program was the accommodating and courteous demeanor of the ring-master and press agent, Mr. Alma, who spared no pains to make his people enjoy themselves."

John D'Alma called at the *Barton County Beacon* and paid the advertising bill.

The final report on Sells & Rentfrow for 1894, appeared in the *Topeka State Journal* on November 21.

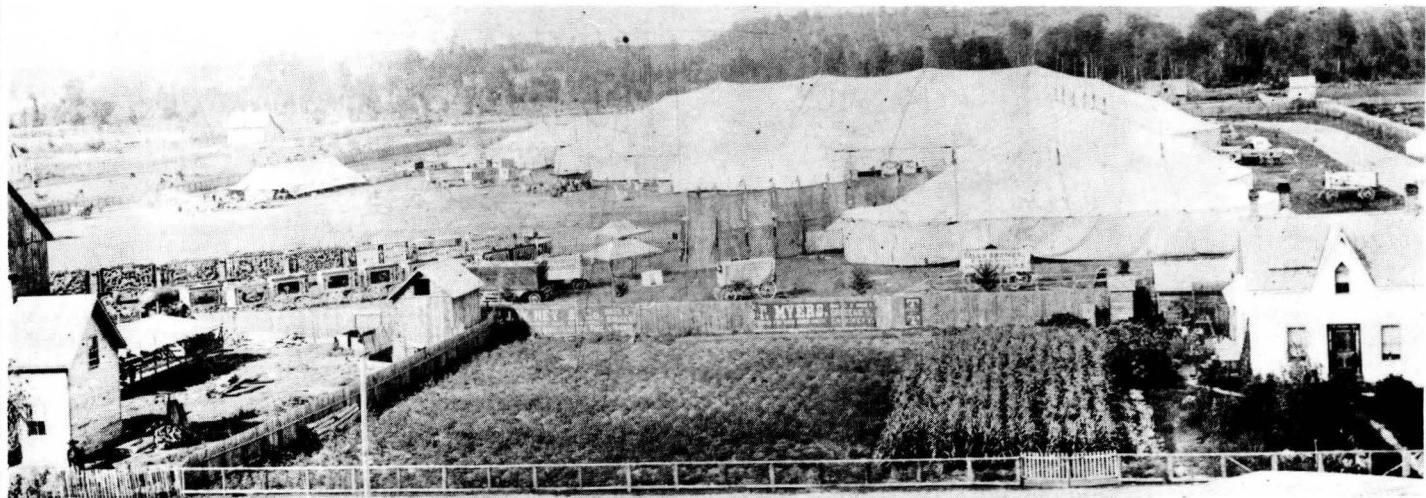
"The Sells & Rentfrow circus which is in a sense a Topeka affair, is about to close the most successful year of its history. The season has lasted longer than usual, and Willie Sells has showed good business sense in making a tour of the northern states early in the season and seeking the warmer climate in cold weather. In the past month the circus has covered the New Mexico circuit, and has nearly finished its operations in Texas.

"The show will go into winter quarters in Denver instead of Topeka as usual, the management looking upon that place as a better starting point in the spring. It is stated, however, that Willie Sells and his wife will return to Topeka and spend the winter here."

The New Great Syndicate Show & Paris Hippodrome Consolidated with Sells & Rentfrow's Enormous Railroad Shows, Triple Circus, Great Elevated Stages, Five Continent Menagerie, Spectacular Pageant & Grand Aggregation of New Sensational Features, in 1894, played these Kansas towns: April 27, Topeka, Evening only, Opener; April 28, Topeka; April 30, Osage City; May 1, Emporia; May 3, Newton; May 4, Hutchinson; May 5, Great Bend.

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Sells Brothers' Enormous R. R. Shows entered Kansas at Atchison in the season



of 1894, giving two exhibitions on July 12.

An ad in the *Daily Champion* proclaimed it to be, "Positively the Only Show that will Exhibit in Atchison this Year."

#### The Greatest Show On Earth

SELLS BROTHERS'

--Enormous--

UNITED R. R. SHOWS,

Augmented by all that is Great, Grand and Gorgeous. A Cyclone of Success. The Big Half-Dollar Show has Lowered its Price within Reach of All.

25 Cents Admits to Combined Shows 25

Circus, Menagerie & Hippodrome.

A Remarkable Record Breaker. Thousands Turned Away at Every Performance. COLOSSAL 3-RING CIRCUS, Royal Roman Hippodrome Sports, Huge Elevated Stages, 50-Cage Menagerie, Gladiator Combats, African Aquarium, Australian Aviary, Arabian Caravan, Spectacular Pageants and Trans-Pacific Wild Beast Exhibit.

ATCHISON, THURSDAY, JULY 12.

Presenting Every Act and all New Features as Represented, Embracing all of the Celebrities of the Arenic World.

200--STARTLING ACTS--200.

In Three Separate Rings  
and Two Elevated Stages.

"It has all the Great Equestriennes, Equestrians, 30 Horse Riders, Educated Horses, Trained Ponies, Performing Elephants, Trained Seals and Sea Lions, Trained Hippopotami, Trained Storks, Rooster Orchestra, Comical Clowns Jolly Jesters Gladiators Jockeys Charioteers, Bicyclists, Leapers, Dancers, in fact all the Champion Performers of America and Europe Grouped in an unprecedented program.

"Sells Brothers' Big Show of the World Is the Generous Master of the Situation Progressive Perpetual Popular Peerless Princely Pre Eminent. Wait for it! See it! Don't Miss It! Its Like is Not on Earth. Grand Glorious Free Street Parade at 10 a. m. on the day of the Exhibition. Two performances Daily at 2 and 8 p. m. 25 CTS Admits to Combined Shows 25 CTS. Circus Menagerie & Hippodrome. Seating capacity 12,000. Everybody provided with a seat."

Show priced at fifty cents suffered small audiences due to the depressed Kansas economy, but Sells Brothers at twenty-five cents drew good crowds and earned a higher profit than it could have earned at fifty cents. In spite of the low admission, Sells Brothers did not skimp on the performance.

"Sells Bros. circus has come and gone," the *Champion* reported, "and it is sure enough the biggest show now on the

road. No one begrudges the quarter spent. They showed what they advertised. The ring performance and trapeze acts were of the best; but what was out of the usual run was the performance of the trained seals and the pair of hippopotami and drove of ostriches in the menagerie exhibition. These are not seen in every show."

In other columns the *Champion* had much to add to the above: "Twelve pickpockets, who were following Sells Bros. circus, were arrested in St. Joseph [Misouri] Wednesday.

"Yesterday seemed so much like a holiday that we were surprised to see the letter carrier come around.

"Sells Bros. financial agent deposited Thursday afternoon seven hundred dollars in the Exchange National bank of our city. Who wouldn't like to be in the show business?

"An express wagon ran into, and upset Frank McFadden's hazard game at the show grounds Thursday morning. His money was scattered in every direction. It was a losing throw for McFadden.

"Henry France of the police force of St. Joseph was in Atchison Thursday morning, interviewing the Sells Bros. in regard to the three men who were arrested in St. Joseph and were charged with committing a murder in Holdridge, Nebraska.

"George Hunter's black mare got scared at the elephants at the circus grounds circus day and ran away, smashing up the buggy to the sum of ten or fifteen dollars. She was finally caught by E. Pickering, the pressman at this office, before he had any injury otherwise than breaking the buggy. If the animal had not been left

covered his intentions, turned upon and belabored him with her umbrella until she nearly fell him to the ground. He took sneak leave and has not been seen since. The lady should be voted a medal of her good metal."

The Atchison *Daily Globe* reported: "There was an accident during the hurdle races at the circus last night. A running horse ridden by Buck Evans stumbled and fell, throwing the rider heavily to the ground. The horse fell partly upon the rider, and he was carried to the dressing rooms. Dr. Mitchell was summoned from the audience, and finding no bones broken, afforded him temporary relief. Evans had just been discharged from a hospital having suffered a similar injury some time ago. He was able to go to Topeka with the circus last night.

"One of the most interesting sights about a circus is to watch the elephants eat. The elephants are usually given a lot of hay with which to engage themselves while in the menagerie, and they never allow anything unclean to go into the cavity under their trunks. First the elephant scatters the hay about promiscuously, and then selects a small bunch after which he blows all the dust out of it. After examining the hay if it is found to be clean, he pokes it into his mouth.

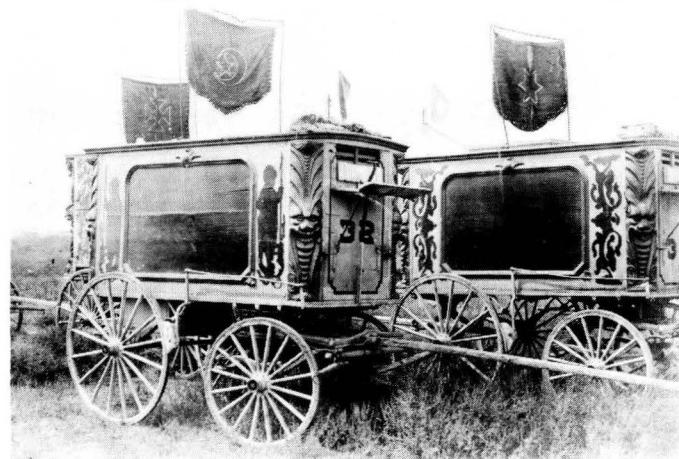
"Remember that the red is ten, and the white is five,' yelled a lemonade seller yesterday. A man from Good Intent was thirsty, and reaching for the tray, he took a white lemonade. 'Remember that the white is ten and the red is five,' continued the refreshment man, as he handed the thirsty customer 15 cents in change for a quarter.

"A man calls at this office, and wants the circus roasted because he paid sixty cents for two tickets.

"It was expected that the elephants would scare when the electric cars passed them yesterday but they didn't. They seemed to have been in town before.

"There was very little crookedness with the circus in town yesterday. The police were very vigilant, but not an arrest was made. There seemed to be as many policemen as people at the circus grounds.

"In police court Pat Casey plead guilty to a plain drunk and carrying concealed weapons and paid \$16.50; Sam Sater paid \$11.50 for drunk and A. Douglas the same; M. G. Beatty was arrested for leaving his horse unhitched and Jesse Harper was charged with assault; Joseph Lyons and Joseph Redburn were arrested for attempted house breaking. The last four cases were not tried this morning.



Two Sells Bros. cross cages from the "50 cage menagerie." Pfening Archives.

without being tied, the accident probably would have never occurred.

"A pickpocket at the circus grounds Thursday morning met his 'waterloo' then and there. While in the act of releasing (sic) a lady of her pocketbook she dis-

"Harry Wilson attempted to get in the circus last night by crawling under the canvas and when the employees (sic) started to put him out a fight was precipitated. Deputy Sheriff Pryor and a couple of special police soon quieted the crowd, wrested Wilson's revolver from him which he had drawn in the fight, and arrested two showmen and Wilson."

The Sells brothers fully understood the value of publicity and their press department was outstanding. Five handouts appeared in the Lawrence *Daily Journal* ahead of the exhibitions of July 13.

The first handout in the *Journal* was published June 30 and was used over and over in Kansas.

**THE MONARCHS.** Twenty-Third Annual Tour of Sells Brothers Enormous United Shows.

"On July 13 the famous Sells Brothers will visit Lawrence with their entire colossal unity of circuses, monster fifty-cage menagerie, royal Roman hippodrome, huge elevated stages, African Aquarium, Australian Aviary, Arabian caravan spectacular pageants, and splendid free street parade. Admission reduced from 50 to 25 cents for everybody. The program of the hippodrome races and general performance are upon a truly imperial scale and introduces the greatest drivers, riders and athletes of both sexes, including an astonishing troupe of Berber and Bedouin Gymnasts. The newly devised spectacle of the Pilgrimage to Mecca will introduce in the arena many rich striking and romantic novelties."

Other handouts appeared July 6, 7, 9 and 11 and in addition frequent use was made of one sentence remarks like the following: "Sells Bros. big show, 25 cents."

"The Sells circus bill posters were in town today [July 7]."

"The small boys visited the depot today to see the circus bill car."

One of the best of Sells Brothers handouts ran July 6: "THE GREATEST SHOW. Many Kinds of Magnificent, Novel and Varied Entertainment."

"The death of Adam Forepaugh and P. T. Barnum places Sells Brothers in the first magnitude. Sells Brothers is now the oldest and largest in every respect as regards genuine merit and enterprise; they are to be assigned first place, while in features of originality and genuine excellence they lead. This is the twenty-third continuous year of their experience in the show business; a longer period

than any other can boast of, and in all that time they have proved able, honorable, progressive, successful and popular caterers to the millions of amusement lovers. Their enlarged and varied confederation this season include the grand spectacular pilgrimage to Mecca, regal Roman hippodrome races, triple circuses, elevated stages, performing animals of all description, tropical aquarium, Australian aviary, fifty cage menagerie, Arabian caravan and the gorgeous street parade. Among the many rare and attractive fea-

"There was ten special police officers on duty in Lawrence to-day."

"The Indians went to the circus today. They came in on the street cars."

"The dust was several inches deep at the show grounds this afternoon."

"The police force had a 'hoodlum' wagon today and were at the grounds taking in all the bums that could be found."

"The show grounds were so far out of town that express wagons, busses and hacks did a good business in hauling people out and back today."

"The street commissioner was on the streets this morning with a great big police badge on and was on duty all day as a special police. It isn't every man that can get one job nowadays, say nothing about two."

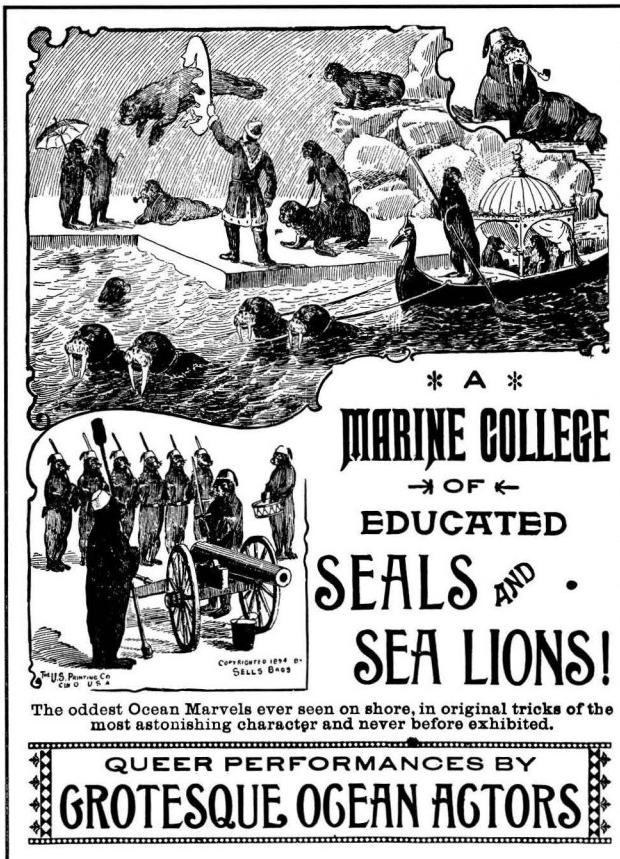
"It is the general idea that circus people are hard to deal with. They are hired to get things as low as possible—one worked Mayor Simmons and got the license reduced in violation of the city ordinances—but Col. Chas. Seeley, the press agent for Sells Bros., is not that kind of a man. He is a good natured, unassuming man and doesn't brag about his show all the time but lets it speak for its self."

"He has been in Lawrence lots of times and was very entertaining in tales told today of former visits to the city."

"As early as 7 o'clock people began coming to Lawrence today for the circus. They kept coming by every possible way until by 10 o'clock the streets were crowded with people and teams. It was a well-dressed crowd and one of the best evidences that Kansas farmers are not suffering from hard times that there has been this year."

"But to return to the circus, the parade was one of the very best ever given in Lawrence and the very best that has been here in the last ten years. It started from the grounds in the west part of town promptly at 10 o'clock, and struck Massachusetts Street at Quincy Street. The parade then went north to the post office corner and there turned west and went to the grounds. It was nearly twenty minutes in passing and the crowd was delighted with the big showing. Three bands made music besides the steam calliope, some plantation singers and the clowns. There were more than the usual number of open cages and the one containing the hippopotami attracted universal attention. The horses were all well fed, sleek, fine looking animals, and with their rich caparisons and hitched to the gilded wagons made a splendid show."

Other comments in the *Journal* were:



The seal act pictured in an 1894 Sells Bros. courier. Pfening Archives.

tures exclusively presented by them will be found the only pair of living giant hippopotami, the remarkable hairless horse, educated seals and sea lions, rooster orchestra, pig circus, giant kangaroos and a whole flock of ostriches and hundreds of novel features. There are also scores of the most eminent charioteers, male and female jockeys, bareback riders, and aerial and other performers and altogether a program not only stupendous, but most exciting, select and refined in character, all of which will be faithfully presented in Lawrence on July 13. All to be seen at the reduced price of admission. Twenty-five cents to all combined shows."

On show day, July 13, the *Journal* had a profusion of short news items.

"Only a few of the seats at the circus were not reserved and many people who thought to get in for a quarter had to pay another to get a seat.

"There was an accident during the circus performance yesterday evening. One of the lady riders was thrown from her chariot and carried out in an insensible condition. Drs. Bunn and Abdelal responded to the call for a physician and found the woman's injuries not serious.

"It was a wonder that there was not more runaways in Lawrence yesterday.

"Some of the Lawrence colored band boys joined the show that was here yesterday.

"The record made by the Lawrence police yesterday was a good one. The special officers on duty, together with the regular force, had the calaboose about full of lodgers for the night.

"Six bums who were arrested to keep them from doing anything were released and ordered to get out of town by the police this morning.

"Sells Bros. shows are having an enormous business. It is a first class show, both menagerie and circus. There are two rings, center platform and hippodrome track, and the entire entertainment is free from harsh features.

"The first performance given by the circus yesterday was at 2:30 p.m., and was witnessed by a tent full of people. It was nice and cool under the big canvas. As good a circus as it is possible to give under a tent was given by the artists of Sells Bros.

"While it is not exactly fair to single out an act, it is surely a wonder, that performance of the seals and sea lions. Its like has never before been seen in Lawrence. The seals play musical instruments, shot guns, etc., and display wonderful intelligence and training. A nice feature of the show is the duplicate work of trapeze, tumbling, riding, etc., by which the entire audience is able to see the same style of act. It is the equal of any show on the road."

It was a delightful day for a circus, with a high temperature of 67 degrees.

A handout in the June 29 Topeka *Mail* gave a slightly inflated opinion of the great Sells Brothers' show.

"SELLS CIRCUS COMING. A Mighty Moral Legitimate Aggregation--At Topeka July 14.

"Sells Brothers wish it distinctly and finally understood that their mammoth show is not divided, never was and never will be but is always and everywhere fully, fairly and squarely presented in its vast entirety. Sells Brothers are truly the pioneer showmen of America and the promoters of all the best up-to-date amusement ideas, the absolute and sole

owners of all the stock, railroad cars, animals cages, chariots, tableaux, tents and all paraphernalia, owning everything renting no privileges. Free from all objectionable features; no games of chance; everything exactly as advertised. Three special trains of railway cars, twelve mammoth tents, one thousand people, five hundred horses and ponies, Three-Ring Circus, Elevated Theater Stages, Hippodrome Races, Fifty-Cage Menagerie, Chariots, Tableau Cars, Floats, Trans-Pacific wild beast Exhibit and Grand Gorgeous Street Parade--the Great-

morning the entire yard force was discharged except one crew to handle Sells Bros. circus train." The Rock Island apparently wished to avoid any damage suits.

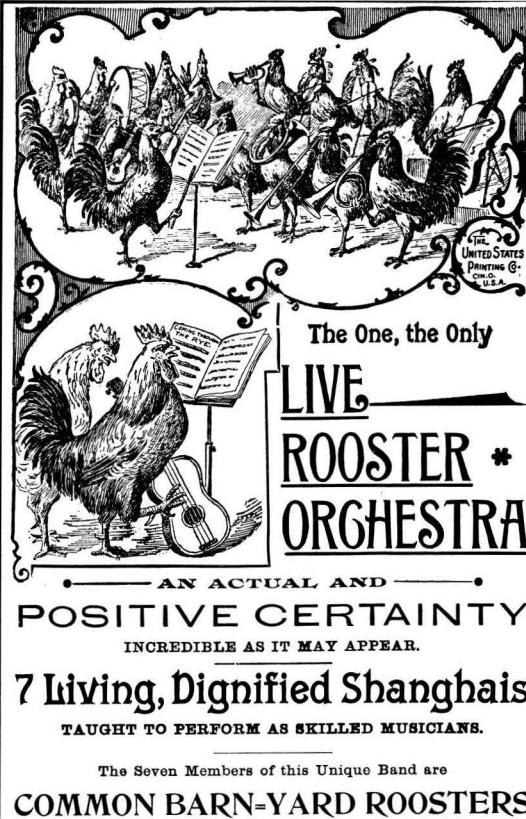
A modest handout appeared in the July 12 *Journal* which, in part, proclaimed "Three big circuses in three separate rings, fifty-cage menagerie, huge elevated stages, gladiatorial combats, royal Roman hippodrome, gala-day sports, Australian avary, African aquarium, Arabian caravan, spectacular pageants and trans-Pacific wild beast exhibit matchless in the mighty majesty of its magnificence. All other shows positively outclassed. The great show of the world. After witnessing the sublime and overwhelming deluge of delights the public will be satisfied because there is absolutely nothing else left in the realm of amusements that possesses any merit whatever. Remember the day and date, last but not least the price--25 cents for everybody. Magnificent and bewildering street parade at 10 a. m. on day of the exhibition. Special excursion rates on all lines of travel."

All this for only 25 cents!

"Ephraim and Lewis Sells are in Topeka today," according to the *Journal* on show day. "Peter Sells would be with them but he is detained by illness at Columbus. The Sells Brothers bring with them their 'immense circus and gigantic collection of wild beasts and acrobatic talent.' The fact that theirs is a twenty-five cent show should not lead to the impression that it is a small or inferior one, for their tent is 420 feet long or 50 feet longer than Ringling's and seats 14,000 people easily. They claim to have 418 people on their payroll and the menagerie is certainly above the average. There are both Asiatic and African lions and seals that can play a banjo and drum. The lions are there and a lot of cubs only a few weeks old. It has all the other animals necessary to a well regulated menagerie.

"Lewis and Ephraim Sells supervise personally most of the thousand details of the circus business. Ephraim Sells operates outside of the tent and Lewis Sells runs the inside. The Sells Bros. rank among the foremost of Topeka's heavy taxpayers, and this with the fact that the circus has wintered here, makes their show in a sense a local institution.

"Col. Charles Seeley, the press agent of the show, says the reduction of the price of admission from 50 to 25 cents has proved a grand success. 'It has proved a winner and we haven't had a losing week this season,' he said today. 'There are a great many people who will pay 25 cents to go to a circus and take their family that would study a good while before paying



The mechanical "Rooster Orchestra" illustrated in an 1894 Sells Bros. courier. Pfening Archives.

est Show on Earth. See it! at the reduced price of 25 cents (children's price) to all. One ticket admits to combined shows. Special holiday excursions will be run on all lines of travel at reduced rates."

The first word of the coming of Sells Brothers to Topeka appeared in the May 17 *Topeka State Journal* in a brief two sentence statement. "Sells Bros. circus will show in Topeka early in July. Col. C. T. Sevalls of St. Louis was in the city yesterday representing them." The date, July 14, was announced on June 26.

A strike by train crews in June was a threat to the show. The *Journal* related on July 2 that: "Not a train has been moved by the Rock Island in Omaha today. This

50 cents. They come and if they don't take a reserved seat they buy some peanuts, or lemonade or stay to the concert, or maybe take in the side show, and the result is that we get 50 cents just the same from a majority of the patrons."

Other show day events noticed by the *Journal*: "Sells' circus has more white horses than have been seen in Topeka in many a day.

"North Topeka Notes. Sells Brothers show surprised the people this morning by parading on this side." Circus parades rarely crossed the Kansas River and North Topeka seldom saw a circus parade.

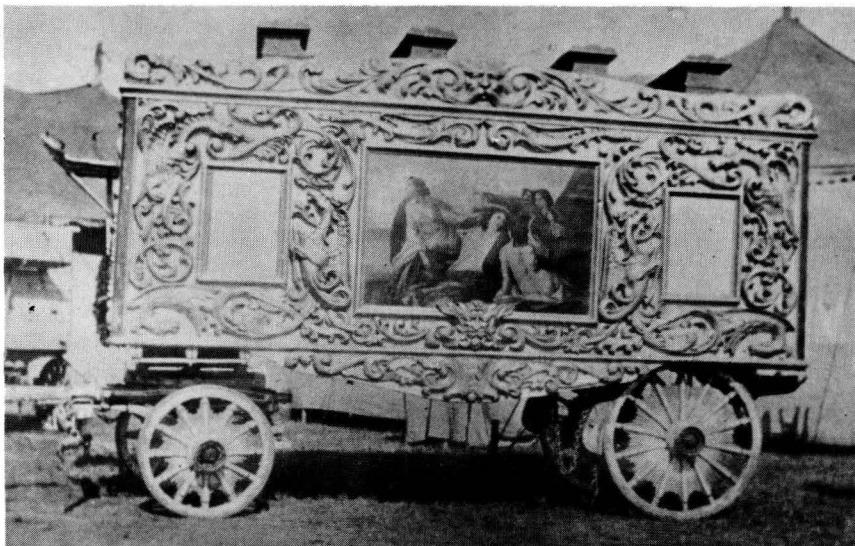
"It took one man thirty minutes to get his transfer check at the Eighth Street station Saturday night in the rain—there was such a crowd." The crowd was a bonanza for the street car company.

"The grandest fake of the season was the 'rooster orchestra' at the side show Saturday night. The figures were of tin with rooster heads stuck through them and the playing was done by machinery.

"The people in the reserved seats at the circus enjoyed the antics of the Kodak man but they were taken in on the last round; it was a tent hand who did the posing the last time and he does it every night." The paper offered no description of the act.

A review by the *Journal* was highly favorable: "The performance given by Sells Bros. circus Saturday evening was such as to justify all the good things said about it. In spite of the threatening weather there was a large crowd present which saw for once at least a 50-cent show for 25 cents. The best feature of the performance was the performing seals and sea lions. The intelligence displayed by these animals was truly wonderful. Trained dogs and horses have become in a sense a matter of course but to see the seals which are wholly unfitted by nature for performing play musical instruments and do feats, is at once unexpected and marvelous.

The ordinary circus features of riding and trapeze performing were up to the



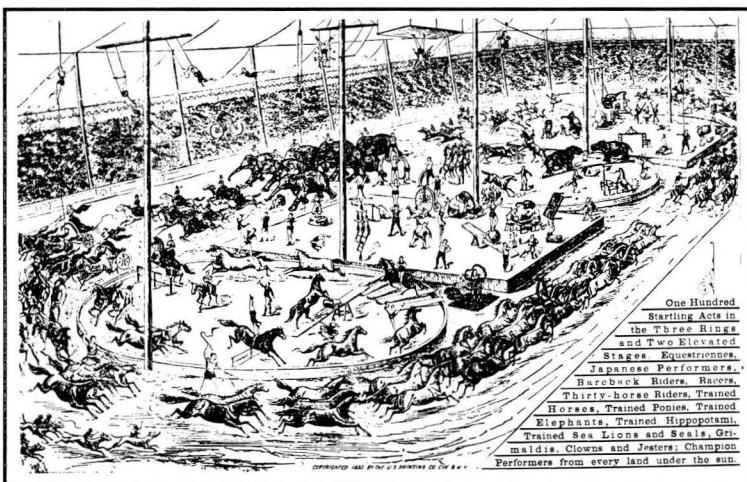
Sells Bros. ornate tableau wagon. Pfening Archives.

standard. Perhaps the most amusing thing of the entire programme was the burlesque by two clowns of the tableaux vivants."

Once again an explanation would have been appreciated—what was the "burlesque by the two clowns of the tableaux vivants?"

The village of Menoken, a close neighbor to Topeka, was raided by thieves while the population was attending the circus in Topeka. The *Journal* reported that, "At the home of A. Bourassa they took a suit of new clothes and a number of small articles; at John Ireland's they secured two gold watches, knives, razors and a revolver; at James Chrisman's they took a pair of pants, a razor, and all of Mrs. Chrisman's jewelry; at A. M. Bates they made the best haul, securing a gold watch and chain, a revolver, a razor and

Illustration from an 1894 Sells Bros. herald. Pfening Archives.



\$31 in money. All the houses visited were ransacked from cellar to garret; beds were ripped open; the stoves were taken to pieces and every place where it seemed possible that valuables might be hid was examined."

At the evening performance a sheriff from St. Joseph, Missouri, arrested two circus employees, Bill Sullivan and Tom Naylor, who were suspected in the murder of a bicyclist near Beatrice, Nebraska.

The July 6 Hutchinson *Headlight* reported that "During the past two weeks Sells Brothers' advance men (bill posters) have used 111 barrels of paste, using forty pounds of flour to the barrel. Our old friend A. D. Butler, the flour man, recently sold them a nice consignment of his famous flour."

The show exhibited in Hutchinson Thursday July 19.

The performances prompted the Hutchinson *Clipper* to relate that: "Sells big show has come and gone and every one is loud in his praise of the big aggregation. It was the finest street parade ever seen in this city and we have the first one to hear speak of it but what says the circus was the best given here for years. They are straight gentlemen and when they advertise the best show on earth for twenty-five cents they mean just what they say. The show given by Sells Bros. in this city Thursday was more than they promised on their bills or in the newspapers. Features never dreamed of before were given. The exhibition of the big Hippopotami and the den of Sea Lions, in the big tent was worth twice the admission price. Every performance was up to the scratch and we take pleasure in saying to the public that if you like the big bills you will be more than pleased with the show for it gives more than it promises. Col. Seeley is a whole team and is a big ad for the great show himself."

Every town Sells Brothers played had praise for the exhibition. Frequently mentioned was the surprise of the patrons at receiving a 50 cent show for only 25 cents. The Wichita *Daily Beacon* claimed that: "The entertainment they gave [Friday July

20] has not been excelled in this city by any combination.

The menagerie was first class, especially admired were the hippos and the ostriches. The circus performance was first class."

A novelty that deserved special mention was "the trained seals and seal lions who rang bells and gave a band concert. Their entertainment was lithe short of marvelous."

In the words of the *Beacon*: "Everybody was satisfied with the show."

Circus day in Arkansas City was July 21.

"A reporter for the Arkansas City *Arkansas Valley Democrat* was moved to remark that: "According to posters a lot of girls in the Sells circus will parade on the street wearing white dresses, made Mother Hubbard, cut low, and trimmed with blue ribbon. We are going to follow that part of the parade."

The Arkansas City *Traveler* said: "The circus parade was a sight to please the veteran and the infant."

Other observations by the *Traveler*: "Buchanan & Showalter furnished the hay for the circus today."

"About the entire population of our suburb of Winfield came down this morning to see the big show and take in the delights of city life.

"The trains this morning each carried extra coaches to accommodate the great crowd of circus goers and the coaches were jammed full. The station platform was alive with people, of all kinds and descriptions, who have come to 'see the elephant.' The great crowd put one in mind of the never to be forgotten days preceding the [Oklahoma] strip opening when every incoming train was full of people and when our streets were a moving mass of humanity."

Show day was proclaimed by the *Traveler* to have been "a gala as well as circus day. There was never finer weather than today for a circus.

"Twenty-five cents, the price of admission is what caught the people. The price suited the times and yet everyone was afraid there was a catch about it. Since it was announced that the Sells would be here with their entire show and give an exhibition at twenty-five cents there has been a great deal of speculation how what was formerly a fifty cent show could exhibit at twenty-five cents. Some claimed that the show was divided, others that

twenty-five cents would be charged for seats, others that all seats were reserved and still others that twenty-five cents was charged for the menagerie and twenty-five cents for the circus.

"These surmises all proved to be false. The circus came. The big trains of animals, stock, etc., the large stretch of canvas and the gorgeous street parade satisfied one and all that all of the show was here. In this connection we wish to say

reserved, and it only costs 25 cents for the reserved seats. You do not have to buy these unless you desire. There are 9,000 other seats you can sit on free of charge."

The columns of the *Traveler* provided some interesting views of the day: "The street fakir is out in numerous quantities.

"It is estimated that not less than 15,000 strangers were in the city today.

"The restaurants today at noon were crowded and it was almost impossible to get anything to eat.

"Keep your hands on your pocketbook and lock up your houses and silverware when you attend the circus tonight.

"Chilocco [Oklahoma Territory] schools came up in full force to see the circus. The little Indian pupils seemed highly excited over the prospect.

"As a sample of the crowd today, it took a reporter 25 minutes to walk two blocks on Summit Street, after the parade had passed. And he was in a hurry, too.

"The giant in the side show was in the Border City restaurant last Saturday night and wrote his autograph on the wall. He stood flat on his feet and wrote his name with a pencil. An ordinary man would need a step ladder to reach it.

"The circus has come and gone and every one was pleased with it. The price of admission was found to be a square deal and the show was first class in every particular. Arkansas City never had a better show. Nothing was cut but the price. The performance was enjoyed by fully 10,000 people. The greatest sight we ever witnessed was the performance of the seals and sea lions. They performed upon several different kinds of musical instruments and did everything they were told to do by their trainer. Sells Bros. circus is the only one that has ever visited our city that was perfectly free from fakirs, toughs and thieves. Not a one was in sight and so far we have heard of no burglaries in the city or of any trouble of any kind that amounted to anything. We were all pleased with the circus and the way it went off. Sells Bros. will always catch a crowd here because they do what is advertised."

Part of an 1894 Sells Bros. herald.  
Pfenning Archives.

that Arkansas City was never treated to such an extensive and magnificent circus parade as we had this morning. It was great with a big G. They gave all they advertised.

"This afternoon the first performance is being given and a large crowd is in attendance. Those who went can and will testify that there was no catch about the price of admission. Twenty-five cents admits you to all menagerie and circus. That was all that was advertised and that was all that was asked or taken in any instance. The menagerie is better this season than ever and the circus performance is improved greatly. The large main tent seats 11,000 and only about 1,500 seats are

The Emporia *Daily Tidings* reviewing circus day of July 23, stated that: "Times may be hard and the country upset with strikes and disaster but the circus goes on forever.

"Some of the most admired features was the troupe of trained seals which



sang, played instruments and fired off a cannon. The big ugly hippopotamus, little Denny Ryan in trapeze work, which was so clever it seemed as if he had invisible wings, when doing the beautiful sensation act of turning a double somersault in the air. The Stirk family did some fine trick bicycle riding.

"After the circus proper came the races, pony races with monkey riders and steeple chases, and the two horse Roman standing races, and a grand finish in the shape of a four horse chariot race in which the favorite always won."

In other columns *Tidings* mentioned: "The show was on 32 cars running in two sections.

"About the funniest feature of the circus was the Chariot race of the clowns. Bundrum (sic) won.

"Six coach loads of excursionists came up from the south over the Katy last evening to attend the night circus.

"The list of casualties at the circus yesterday numbered four. Three ladies fainted and were carried out. A man was carried out also but he had painted some."

A short paragraph in the July 5 Parsons *Palladium* reported that "J. E. Boyle, press agent of Sells Bros. big show, arrived in the city Monday afternoon [June 22] and billed the city and made his contracts with the city newspapers. We found Mr. Boyle a pleasant and courteous gentleman."

Circus day for Parsons was July 24.

The Parsons *Independent* thought that "Sells Bros. circus was a good show and had an enormous crowd Tuesday. The performance gave general satisfaction and its show was not followed by a crowd of thieves as is usually the case.

"One of the most interesting displays and certainly one of the most uncommon, according to the Parsons *Weekly Sun*, "was that given by Prof. Woodward's family of seals. This remarkable feature of the show draws forth merited applause.

"On the whole the show gave great satisfaction and more than maintained its former good reputation."

July 28 at Ft. Scott was the final day of the Kansas tour. The Ft. Scott *Tribune* had no comment on the performance, but it did report a few transgressions.

"Several tub lemonade men did a thriving business on the street corners this morning, but this afternoon a number of the tubs were without owners. The fakirs who had established them had worked the 'short change' game and fled. They worked the same way. For example, a young farmer named Wood bought a glass of lemonade from the fellow at the junction of Main, Market and Oak Streets.

Trained ostriches pictured in an 1894 Sells courier. Pfening Archives.

He had no change and presented a \$10 bill in payment. The fellow took the bill, saying he would go and get it changed. He never came back, but another fellow took charge of the tub. He was arrested and arraigned before Justice Garrison but as there was no evidence to convict him, he was dismissed.

"Officer Coe arrested a fellow at the show grounds on the same charge. He was locked up and still remains in the cal-

aboose. The boy who claims to have been duped by him positively identifies him. The town was full of fakirs all day.

"While witnessing the circus parade last Saturday Mrs. Mary Haverly of 517 Margrave Street, mother of Judge Osborn, lost her pocket book containing \$10 in currency, \$1.25 in silver and a pair of small tweezers."

The most touching story concerned H. C. Buckett: "A fellow giving his name as H. C. Buckett, forty years old, was arrested Saturday evening for stealing a pumpkin pie out of a farmer's wagon. The poor fellow was hungry and he displayed mighty good taste in choosing the pie for it was a fine one. He remained locked up until Monday morning when Judge Osborn allowed him to leave town."

The tour of the 25 cent show brought the Sells brothers invaluable publicity. It was more circus than any 25 cent show had ever before presented. Complaints charging sharp practices were almost nonexistent and there is a feeling that those few were in no way sanctioned by the management. They gave a good show at a popular price and the public crowded the tents.

Sells Brothers' Enormous United Railroad Shows in 1894 played these Kansas towns: July 12, Atchison; July 13, Lawrence; July 14, Topeka; July 16, Junction City; July 17, Salina; July 18, McPherson; July 19, Hutchinson; July 20, Wichita; July 21, Arkansas City; July 23, Emporia; July 24, Parsons; July 25, Joplin, Missouri; July 28, Ft. Scott, Kansas.

*Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Inc. Topeka, Kansas.*

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## Howe Bros. Supplement

It has been *Bandwagon's* policy is to run supplements to provide new information, correct errors, or clarify points in the original article. In "Howe Bros. Circus and Other Tom Atchison Shows," by Joseph T. Bradbury in the September-October 1993 issue there was conflicting information on the opening date of the 1937 Howe Bros. Circus and an erroneous date given for the closing. Portions of the route were also missing.

Walter Van Dyke, who played trombone in Henry Blank's band, was on the show the entire season and recently very kindly sent the author the complete route from his personal log book. He also provided other interesting comments on the season, all of which we are pleased to pass on to *Bandwagon* readers. The full route will not be printed, but a copy has been placed with the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Howe Bros. Circus played a forty week season, one of the longest of any show in 1937. It opened March 11 at Mesa, Arizona. It later entered the following states at the stand and date indicated: El Centro, California, March 29; Carson City, Nevada, April 24; St. George, Utah, May 11; Evanston, Wyoming, May 25; Sturgis, South Dakota, June 6; Hettinger, North Dakota, June 11; Leola, South Dakota, July 15; Spencer, Nebraska, July 23; Con-



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ROUTE CARD NO. 1

DATE	TOWN	STATE	MILES
APR. 11	MESA	ARIZ.	16
" 12	FLORENCE	"	52
" 13	TUCSON	"	70
" 15	NOGALES	"	65
" 16	TOMBSTONE	"	77
" 17	BISBEE	"	26
" 18	DOUGLAS	"	23
" 19	BENSON	"	26
" 20	CHANDLER	"	150
TOTAL MILEAGE			505

Howe Bros. Circus No. 1 1937 route card. Walter Van Dyke collection.

cordia, Kansas, August 9; Kansas City, Missouri, August 20; Olathe, Kansas, August 24; Mt. Vernon, Missouri, September 1; Truman, Arkansas, September 25; Somerville, Tennessee, October 7; Athens, Alabama, October 12; Rockmart, Georgia,

October 22; Jennings, Florida, November 12; and Slidell, Louisiana, November 25.

The show closed at Maringovin, Louisiana on December 16.

The original article stated the show closed on November 11 at Blackshear, Georgia but this was in error. That town, in fact, wasn't even played. It was in Homerville, Georgia that day and moved on the following day into Florida at Jennings. After its stand at Greenville, Florida on November 19 the show then moved 455 miles to Slidell, Louisiana where it played on November 25. No performances were given during the five day period, November 20-24. Following the close the show moved westward and wintered just across the Texas border at Orange.

Mr. Van Dyke's log noted the show travelled 12,746 miles during the season. The longest jump was 455 miles from Greenville, Florida to Slidell, Louisiana and the shortest was 12 miles from Porterville, California to Manford. At the time of the closing he recalls the weather was bad, the cookhouse bad, and the band was not getting paid. He concludes, however, that Tom Atkinson was one of the best persons he ever worked for. Atkinson died the following year.

The *Bandwagon* staff would like to thank Walter Van Dyke for providing this information for the 1937 Howe Bros. Circus story.

## BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS



This 1903 letterhead is printed in orange and green. The letter, addressed to the Ringling brothers, states that Wilson was going out of the animal business and offered a "very fine" Bengal tiger for \$350.

# Mike Martin's CIRCUS HOBBY HALL

## Books You May Have Missed

**"A CIRCUS GIRL'S COOKBOOK"** - Sarah Chapman  
This 120 page soft back is alot more than the title suggest. More than a cookbook it's a bit of a performers diary, relating a personal insight into circus life.

Spending 6 seasons with Ringling/Barnum as the center ring aerial feature, Sarah continued her career with other major shows. Then in 1983, a few years after "hanging up her tights", she authored this entertaining photo illustrated book.

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### **"Midways, Judges & Smooth-Tongued Fakirs"** -

David Jones

This is the story of the country fair. But more than a celebration of agricultural life, it was the site of outrageous midway attractions, cooch dancers and "Smooth-Tongued Fakirs" of every description!

This 155 page soft back book is loaded with photos of carnival attractions, snake, medicine and side shows. Plus classic photos of the old Johnny J. Jones Carnival touring Canada at the turn of the century.

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### **"THE LOVE OF THE CIRCUS"** - Jamieson & Davidson

Here's an oversized, 10" x 13", hard back first published in 1980. With full color dust jacket picturing Gunther and tiger on elephant back. Foreward by Mary Chipperfield.

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# Circus Life and Adventure of ADAM BARDY

A Connecticut magazine recently wrote this about Adam Bardy's book:

"If you're still a kid at heart when the circus comes to town, you'll love Adam Bardy's life story of his adventures of circus life. Adam Bardy was born in Webster on May 21, 1907. Back in 1907 thousands of immigrants from Europe kept coming to America.

"Bardy's life might be compared somewhat to Mark Twain's boyhood heroes Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and back in 1907 in June, Mark Twain met George Bernard Shaw in London. It was a rainy Saturday when the Buffalo Bill Circus came to Webster. Adam Bardy was only 8 years old when he crawled into a circus wagon that night. However on Sunday morning when he crawled out of his hiding place, he wanted to get back home. Bardy had to have a guardian angel as he got back home before he was missed.

"In 1924 Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus played in Worcester. Bardy's interest in the circus was renewed and he got a job with the side show. The circus liked getting young men to join them because it was out of young people that real circus troupers were made.

"Bardy found that circus life in the roaring twenties was rough and tough. On sunny days it was wonderful, but on rainy days you went to bed in the circus cars with wet clothes, and you would have to wait for a sunny day to dry out. If you could put in a full circus season under these conditions, you would be called a real trouper. In the twenties Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey was a railroad circus. It traveled in four sections. The first section was the cookhouse crew along with some circus wagons that carried the cookhouse. The second section carried most of the circus wagons and the stock cars full of work horses and nearly all the working crew. The third section carried the wild animal cages. There were 43 elephants with the circus.



"One of our heroes was Tom Mix and on Saturday afternoon when the local movie theater featured westerns. Tom Mix and his wonder horse Tony was a favorite of young and old movie fans. We recall that Tom Mix was with the Sells Floto Circus and we were invited to attend the circus and see Mix in person in Willimantic. Adam Bardy was working with the Sells-Floto Circus at the time and knew Mix very well. There were more circuses in business in the twenties than there are now. Hagenback and Wallace, John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, Sparks and Walter L. Main were some of the big ones.

"Few folks realized that Tom Mix was at one time a real sheriff, a Deputy U.S. Marshall, a Texas Ranger, a real cow puncher and ranch foreman. He was even Roughrider under Teddy Roosevelt. For Bardy to personally know and work with Mix was one of the truly great thrills of his wonderful life. Mix was one of the truly greats of the silent movies.

"Adam Bardy at the age of 86 can look back at his many adventurous experiences in the circus, life with Gypsies, fortune telling, bootlegging, marriages, and finding love and happiness.

"He has written a book The Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy. This book would have made a wonderful movie with enough wholesome family desires of an eight year old "running away" for a day; joining the circus and becoming a boss canvasman and having his crew set up the big circus tent while still a teenager. Fortune telling, boxing, bootlegging, and after four score years becoming a successful author. With the right promotional agency, the life and adventures of Adam Bardy could be made into a television series that might parallel the Untouchables and Little House on the Prairie. Many men desire the anonymity of Mister X but Adam Bardy is a real Mr. X . . . Ex-Circus Man, Ex-Pugilist, Ex-Still Operator, Ex-Bootlegger, Ex-Fortune Teller, and an excellent author."

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy, send check or money order for \$12.95 to:

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Thompson, CT 06277